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Jettatrice.

By MME. CRAVEN,

Author of "Fleurange," &c.



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JETTATRICE;

OR,

The Veil Withdrawn.

BY



MADAME AUGUSTUS CRAVEN,

Author of "A Sister's Story," "Fleurange," "Anne Severin," etc.

—♦♦♦—

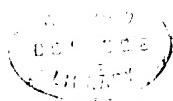
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THE VEIL WITHDRAWN.

I.

SEPTEMBER 1, 1871.

IT was at Messina, July 15, 18—. I have never forgotten the date. It was just after my fifteenth birthday. The balcony of the room where I was sitting overlooked the sea. From time to time, but more and more faintly, could be heard the noise of the waves breaking against the shore. It was the hour called in Italy the *contr' ora*—the hour when, in summer, the whole horizon is aflame with the scorching rays of the already declining sun, which are no longer tempered by the gentle wind from the sea that every morning refreshes the shore. The windows, that had been open during the earlier part of the day, were now shut, the blinds lowered, and the shutters half closed. Profound silence reigned within doors and without. For many, this is the hour of a siesta; and for all, a time of inaction and repose.

I was holding a book in my hand, not from inclination or pleasure, but simply through obedience, because I had a lesson to learn. But that was no task. I took no pleasure in studying, nor was it repugnant to me, for I learned without any difficulty. The chief benefit of study was therefore lost on me. It required no effort.

I had not yet even taken the trouble to open my book, for I saw by the clock I had ample time.

At six I always went into the garden, which I was not allowed to enter during the heat of the day. There was still an hour before me, and I knew that a quarter of that time would be sufficient to accomplish my task. I therefore remained indolently seated on a low chair against the wall, near the half-open shutter, motionless and dreaming, my eyes wandering vaguely through the obscurity that surrounded me.

The room I occupied was a large *salon*. The ceiling covered with frescos, and the stuccoed walls brilliantly ornamented with flowers and arabesques, prevented this vast apartment from seeming gloomy or ill-furnished. And yet, according to the tastes I have since acquired, it was absolutely wanting in everything signified by the word "comfort," which, though now fully understood in our country, has nevertheless no corresponding term in our language. A clumsy gilt *console*, on which stood a ponderous clock, with an immense looking-glass above, occupied the further end of the room; and in the middle stood a large, round, scagliola table under a magnificent chandelier of Venetian glass. This chandelier, as well as the mirrors that hung around, not for use, but to ornament the walls with their handsome gilt frames and the figures painted on their surface, were the richest

and most admired objects in the room. A few arm-chairs systematically arranged, a long sofa that entirely filled one of the recesses, and here and there some light chairs, were usually the only furniture of this vast apartment; but that day a small couch stood near the window, and on it reclined my mother—my charming young mother! —her head resting on a pillow, and her eyes closed. On her knee lay a small book, open at a scarcely touched page, which, with the ink-stand on a little table before her, and the pen fallen at her feet, showed she had been overpowered by sleep or fatigue while she was writing.

My mother at that time was barely thirty-two years of age. People said we looked like sisters, and there was no exaggeration in this. I was already taller than she, and those who saw me for the first time thought me two years older than I really was; whereas my mother, owing to the delicacy of her features and the transparency of her complexion, retained all the freshness of twenty years of age. I looked at her. Her beautiful hair, parted on her pale brow, fell on the pillow like a frame around her face, which looked more lovely than ever to me. There was a deeper flush than usual on her cheeks, and her half-open lips were as red as coral. . . . I smilingly gazed at her with admiration and love! Alas! I was too much of a child to realize that this beauty was ominous, and that I had much more reason to weep! . . .

My mother was left an orphan at fifteen years of age without any protector, and poverty would have been added to her other privations had not Fabrizio dei Monti, a friend of her father's, and a cele-

brated lawyer, succeeded in snatching the young heiress' property from the hands of a grasping relative who had been contending for it. This law-suit had been going on several years, and the result was still doubtful when Count Morani, Bianca's father, died.

He who rendered the young orphan so signal a service was then about thirty-five years old. He was a widower, and the father of two children, to whom he devoted all the time left him by his numerous clients, whom his reputation for ability brought from all parts of Sicily—famed, as every one knows, for the most complicated and interminable law-suits. Fabrizio, after his wife's death, had given up all intercourse with society, except what was imposed on him by the obligations of his profession. With this exception, his life was spent in absolute retirement with an austerity as rare among his fellow-citizens as his long fidelity to the memory of the wife he had lost.

But when, after advocating Bianca's cause, he found himself to be her only protector, he at once felt the difficulty and danger of such a situation, and resolved to place her, without any delay, under the guardianship of a husband of her own choice. He therefore ran over the names of the many aspirants to the hand of the young heiress, and gave her a list of those he thought the most worthy of her.

"You have forgotten one," said Bianca in a low tone, after glancing over it.

"Whom?" . . . inquired Fabrizio in an agitated tone, not daring to interpret the glance that accompanied her words.

Bianca still retained all the sim-

plicity of a child, and the timidity of womanhood had not yet come over her. Accordingly, she said, as she looked directly towards him, that she should never feel for any one else the affection she had for him; and if he would not have her, she would go into a convent, and never be married.

It was thus my mother became Fabrizio dei Monti's wife, and, in spite of the difference of their ages, there never was a nobler, sweeter union. A happier couple could not have been found in the world during the fourteen years that followed my birth. But for several months past, my father had appeared depressed and anxious. Sometimes I could see his eyes blinded by tears as he looked at my mother, but the cause I did not understand. It is true, she often complained of fatigue, and remained in bed for hours, which became more and more prolonged. And now and then she passed the whole day there. But when she was up, as she had been that day, she did not look ill. On the contrary, I never saw her look more beautiful than while I was thus gazing at her with admiration and a love amounting to idolatry. . . .

After remaining for some time in the same attitude, I at length took my book, and endeavored to give my whole attention to my lesson. But the heat was stifling, and, after a few moments, I was, in my turn, overpowered by an irresistible drowsiness, to which I insensibly yielded without changing my position, and soon sank into a profound slumber.

I had been asleep some time, when I was suddenly awakened by a remote, indistinct sound that seemed like the continuation of the dream it had interrupted. This

sound was the footsteps of a horse. . . .

I sprang up without taking time for a moment's reflection. I raised the blinds, hurriedly opened the shutters and the window, and sprang out on the balcony. . . . The room was at once flooded with light and filled with the evening air. The sun had just disappeared, and a fresh breeze fanned my cheeks. . . . I heard my mother cough feebly, but did not turn back. I was overpowered by one thought, which made me forget everything else—everything!—even *her!* . . . I leaned forward to see if I was mistaken. No, it was really *he!* . . . I saw him appear at the end of the road that connected our house with the shore. He rode slowly along on his beautiful horse, which he managed with incomparable grace. As he came nearer, he slackened his pace still more, and, when beneath the balcony, stopped, and, taking off his hat, bowed profoundly, the wind meanwhile blowing about the curls of his jet-black hair. Then he raised his eyes, of the color and tempered clearness of agate, and with a beseeching, passionate look seemed to implore me for some favor. . . . I knew what he meant. . . . Foolish child that I was! I snatched from my hair the carnation I had placed there an hour before, and threw it towards him! . . .

At that instant I heard a piercing cry—a cry that still rings in my heart, and the memory of which will never be effaced—“Ginevra!” . . . Hurrying in, I found my mother standing in the floor, pale and gasping for breath, with her arms extended towards me. . . . I instantly realized I had been guilty of an indiscretion which had afflicted and displeased her. I

was at once filled with sorrow, and on the point of throwing myself at her feet to beg her forgiveness; but before I had time to speak, or even reach her, she fell back on her couch in a semi-unconscious state that I should have thought a swoon, had not a spasmodic groan from time to time escaped from her breast, and when I did prostrate myself, had she not seized one of my hands, which she continued to hold with a strong grasp in hers. . . .

We remained thus for some minutes without my being able to leave her to call for assistance, though the frightful change in her face filled me with inexpressible terror as well as the keenest anguish. I withdrew my hand at last, and threw my arms around her neck, exclaiming repeatedly amid my sobs: "Forgive me! Answer me! Oh! tell me that you forgive me! . . ." She made no reply, however, but by degrees she returned to herself and grew calm. Then, taking me in her arms, she held me a long time closely embraced, as if she felt there was no safety for me anywhere else, and longed in some way for the power of taking me once more into her maternal breast, that I might live with her life, or die if she died! . . .

O Almighty God! the prayer that then rose from her heart in behalf of her poor child thou alone didst hear! But when I recall all the errors of my past life and thy wonderful mercy towards me, I feel it was in answer to that prayer thou hast bestowed on me so many benefits! I know that at that instant a new source of grace was opened to me never to be exhausted—a look of mercy vouchsafed that nothing has ever extinguished! . . .

My mother still remained speech-

less, but her respiration became more and more regular, though, alas! still too rapid, and her features resumed their usual appearance. But her bright color had given place to a deadly paleness, and a large dark ring encircled her sweet, expressive eyes, now fastened on me with a look I had never read there before. She bent down and kissed me, and I felt two great tears fall on my forehead, as her pale lips murmured these words:

"O my God! since it is thy will I should die and leave her behind me, I commit her to thy care. Watch over her, I pray thee, better than I have done."

"Die!" . . . my mother die! . . . I sprang up with a sudden, violent bound, as if smitten to the heart, and stood motionless like one petrified. A frightful vision appeared before me! . . . a vision I had not been prepared for by the slightest apprehension, or anxiety, or suspicion. Notwithstanding the too precocious development of my sensibilities, there was something child-like in my peculiar temperament that had blinded my eyes, now so suddenly opened! I tried to recall the words I had just heard, but my mind grew confused, and was conscious of nothing but a sharp pang I had never yet experienced, but the cause of which had faded from my remembrance. I turned away, perhaps with the vague thought of calling assistance, perhaps to close the window, but staggered, as if dizzy, and fell to the ground behind the curtain of the window.

At that instant the door opened. I heard the mingled voices of my father and several other persons. Some one sprang forward, exclaiming: "The window open at this late hour! . . . Who could have

been so imprudent?" Then I was conscious that they were gathering around my mother. My father took her up in his arms, and carried her out of the room. . . . No one had perceived me in the increasing obscurity, as I lay on the floor, half

concealed by the curtain. I had not fainted, but I was in a partially insensible state, incapable of any clear notions except the wish to lose all consciousness of suffering in a sleep from which I should never awake! . . .

II.

I know not how long I remained in this condition. When I opened my eyes, the moon was shining so brightly that the room was as light as day. I rose up, and threw a terrified glance around. Everything in the moonlight wore an ominous aspect, and I shuddered as my eyes fell on the couch and the white pillow on which I had seen my mother's face resting. What had happened? . . . A long time seemed to have elapsed, and I felt as if on the edge of an abyss—an abyss of sorrow into which I was about to be precipitated. O my God! was it a mere dream, or was it a frightful reality? I could not tell. I soon became conscious of an excruciating pain in my head, and my teeth began to chatter with a violent chill. I rose up to go out, but it was only with the greatest difficulty that I reached my mother's couch, on which I threw myself in despair, burying my face in the pillow where she had reposed her dear head. I burst into sobs, and this explosion of grief afforded me momentary relief.

I then attempted to leave the room, and was proceeding towards the door, when my attention was attracted to something that had fallen on the floor. It was my mother's little book, the silver clasp of which glittered in the light of the moon. I picked it up, and had just concealed it, when the door opened, and my sister Livia (my father's

oldest daughter) appeared with a light in her hand.

"Gina!" she exclaimed, "how you frightened me! What are you doing here, child, at this late hour? I thought you were in the garden. How long have you been here?"

I made no reply. I felt as if I should die of mortification, should any one learn what had taken place before my mother's ill turn; but Livia did not repeat her question. She was pale and preoccupied, and her eyes were red with weeping.

What could have happened? My heart throbbed with suspense, but I had not courage enough to ask a single question. She had come for the pillow left on the couch, and seemed to be hunting for something she could not find. Perhaps it was my mother's note-book, which at night she always laid on a table beside her bed. But I did not give it to her. I wished to restore it myself, and, though generally frank with Livia, said nothing about finding it. Agitated as I was, I felt that this little book was a treasure that belonged solely to me—a treasure of which I must never allow any one to deprive me. She made me hold a light to aid her in her vain search, but, not finding it, she took the rest of the things on the stand, and left the room. I followed her, and we walked along together through the gallery that led to my mother's chamber, which was at the end.

This gallery, or, rather, open *loggia*, looked down on the inner court of the old palace we lived in, and extended entirely around it. The landing of the principal staircase to the first story connected with the gallery, was precisely opposite the place where we were, when, all at once, we heard in that direction a sound—confused at first, and then more distinct—of chanting and the measured steps of several people, mingled with the constant ringing of a bell. Presently a bright light shone through all that side of the gallery, and through the arches we saw a long procession appear, and proceed around towards the door directly before us, . . . the door of my mother's chamber. . . . Livia knelt down, and made a sign for me to do the same, but I remained standing, my eyes staring wide open before me in a kind of stupor. I saw the long file of white penitents as they came with lighted torches in their hands; then appeared the canopy under which walked Don Placido, my mother's aged confessor, carrying the Divine Host in a silver Ciborium. . . . I could see his long, white beard, his bowed head, his sad, recollected look, and that was all. In an instant the truth flashed across my mind; then everything vanished.

This new shock followed the other so quickly that it caused a deeper and more dangerous swoon; and when I was taken up senseless, and carried to my chamber, it was with the fear that this fatal night would be the last for the daughter as well as the mother. . . .

I have no recollection of what took place for a long while after. I only remember that, opening my eyes one day, I saw Ottavia (my mother's nurse, who had brought me up) beside my bed. I recog-

nized her, and stammered a few words. . . . She murmured: "Blessed be God!" but did not add another word. A thousand thoughts rushed across my mind, but I could not analyze them, and the one which might seem of the least importance was that which I gave utterance to first.

"My mother's book," . . . I said repeatedly.

Ottavia, without speaking, at once raised the lid of a large ebony coffer that stood on the table not far from my bed, and took out the little book with the silver clasp. She held it up, and then replaced it in the box, which she locked. Turning to me, she put her finger on her lips. I obeyed the sign, and remained silent, but I slept no more till evening. By degrees my mind grew clear, and my confused recollections distinct. The fever that had brought me so near to death's door now abated, and from that day my convalescence was rapid. But the chief thing that renewed life and strength restored, was the faculty of suffering, and comprehending in all its fulness the reality of my misfortune.

My mother was no more. She did not live to see the morrow of the day when she embraced me for the last time. My father's agitated face revealed this terrible fact more clearly even than the mourning he wore. . . . But I did not learn the details of her last hours till a long time after the day when, for the second time, he lost the light of his fireside. Knowing the keen impetuosity of my disposition, a violent explosion of grief had been anticipated. But it was not so. On the contrary, I fell into a state of gloomy silence that gave rise to fresh anxiety to those who had so long trembled for my life.

The physician, however, advised my father, my sister Livia, and Ottavia, who took turns at my bedside, to leave everything to time without attempting to oppose me. I therefore passed day after day without appearing to notice their presence. But on other days, I silently made some sign of gratitude, which would bring a smile to my father's pale face. Then Livia would embrace me, saying: "Courage, *bambina!** Try to love God's holy will." Or Ottavia, as she used to do when I was only four years old, would hold up the silver cross on her cornelian rosary, which I always looked at with pleasure. And when they saw me kiss it for the first time, they began to hope, in spite of my silence, for the return of my reason. But my eyes would become fixed again, and I would cease to recognize any one. And when my pillow was found wet with my tears, as was often the case, the physician would say: "That is a good sign; let her weep. It is a relief she needs." But days passed, and my mental condition remained the same.

My strength nevertheless returned. I was able to get up, and several times I walked a few steps on the terrace leading from my chamber without any injury. But nothing could break the unnatural silence that transformed into an inanimate statue the girl whose excessive vivacity and unrestrained liveliness had sometimes disturbed, sometimes enlivened, the whole house, filling it throughout with the sense of her presence.

One day I was sitting on my terrace, looking off over the gulf, when Ottavia approached, and, as usual, began to talk with the vain hope of

drawing forth some reply. I generally listened in silence, but that day a new train of thought came into my mind, which I felt the power of pursuing clearly, calmly, and with a certain persistence that proved my physical strength was at last beginning to triumph over the kind of mental paralysis which made my convalescence seem like a new phase of my disease.

Ottavia had placed a number of books on a small table beside me. She knew nothing of them but the covers, but she offered them to me one by one, hoping to induce me to read—a diversion it was desirable I should take to. At last I shook my head, and for the first time pushed away the book she offered me. Then I spoke, and the sound of my voice was a joyful surprise to my faithful attendant:

"No, Ottavia, not that one. I want another book, and that alone—the one you put away there," with a gesture and glance towards the further end of my chamber.

Ottavia understood me, but hesitated between the joyful hope of my cure awakened by my reply, and the fear of causing fresh excitement which might bring on another relapse. But after all the means that had been used to rouse me from the state of apathy into which I had fallen, it did not seem prudent to oppose that which I had chosen myself. She therefore obeyed my request, and, without any reply, opened the ebony coffer where she had put my mother's book, as if it were a relic, and placed it in my hands.

"Thank you, Ottavia," I said. And putting my arms around her neck, I kissed her, causing big tears of joy to roll down her cheeks. "And now leave me, I beg of you; leave me alone for an hour."

* Little girl.

She hesitated a moment, and looked at me uneasily, but then complied as before with my wish, and, after seeing that I was sheltered from the sun and wind, noiselessly left the balcony through my room.

I then kissed the cover of the book I held in my hand, and opened it with awe. It seemed to me I was about to hear my mother's voice from the depths of the tomb!

III.

MAY 15, 18—

—Ginevra! It is to her I consecrate these pages—the child that at once fills my heart with inexpressible anxiety and the tenderest affection—the child whom I love so dearly, but whom my hands perhaps are too feeble to guide. And yet I shudder at the thought of leaving her behind me. My strength, however, is rapidly failing, and I feel that my poor child will soon be left alone.

Alone! This word may seem harsh to you, Fabrizio mio, and, lest this should meet your eye, I will explain my meaning.

I know you have as tender a heart as mine, and your prudence is far greater; but, to tell you the truth, you likewise are too fond of her! You know how many times I have taken her from your arms to make room for poor Livia, so often grieved by your involuntary forgetfulness, but not offended with her little sister, because she too, like every one else, felt that Ginevra from her infancy had the power of charming every eye and heart around her! . . .

But though to Livia you were sometimes indifferent, you were never severe, whereas, though generally too indulgent to Ginevra, when you detected some fault in her, I have often seen you inclined to go from one extreme to another, and been obliged to beg you to leave the correction to time or to her mother.

She has grown up, as she is, in

our midst, like one of the flowers of our clime which put forth their beauty almost without cultivation, rejoicing our hearts and our eyes, and intoxicating us all with the perfume of her grace and caressing affection.

O yes! it is nothing but intoxication, and I have perhaps yielded to it with too much delight; but I repeat it, it is I alone, among all who have loved her, whose delight has been unmixed with blindness.

Perhaps this was because (pardon me, Fabrizio) I loved her more than any one else, and because the affection of a mother has something divine in its clearness of vision. I see this charming child, to whom I have given birth, as she is. I understand her real nature. I look into her pure soul as into the limpid waters of some beautiful lake. But clouds are now passing over its surface. Others are rising and gathering, and I tremble to think a storm may some day rise up to overwhelm and crush her!

JUNE 1.

This is Ginevra's fifteenth birthday. I will describe her, not only as she appears to me, but to every one else.

She is slender and graceful in form, and an inch or two taller than I. There is an habitual sweetness and languor in her large, brown eyes; but when they are suddenly lit up with surprise, wonder, or any other unexpected emotion, they glow with wonderful ex-

pression and brilliancy. Her hair, of a golden hue which is as beautiful as it is rare in our country, parts on a pure white brow which forms almost a continued straight line with a nose of perfect regularity, so that her profile would be quite faultless were not her mouth larger than is consistent with the standard of classical beauty. But this blemish is redeemed by the expression of her mouth, sometimes grave and thoughtful enough to excite anxiety, sometimes half open with a child-like smile, and often extended with hearty laughter, like that of a peasant, displaying two beautiful rows of small, white teeth.

And now, O my child! I would with the same sincerity describe the lineaments of your soul, which is far dearer to me than your face—yes, dearer to me than my own life, or even than yours!

In the inner recesses of this soul—and I thank God for it!—is hidden, even from her, a jewel of purity and truth which it would be far easier to crush than deface. Then, like a strong wind that cannot shake this foundation, but seeks entrance through every pore, beats a loving nature that cannot be denied its food, which is the predominant trait in her character. Passing over her other good qualities and her defects, and speaking merely of her outward appearance, it must be confessed that she manifests the excessive vanity of a child, and a want of reflection that would be surprising in a girl of ten years old, mingled with a passionate ardor that would excite anxiety in one of twenty!

Such is my poor child—such are the attractive but alarming traits that constitute the peculiar nature she has inherited.

O Almighty God! . . . two more years of life, . . . that I may watch over her till the day I am able to entrust her to the care of some one she can regard with the true devotion of a wife!

Alas! this desire is consuming my life. It is shortening my days. It is hastening my end, which I regard with calmness when I merely consider myself, but which fills me with terror when I think only of her.

JUNE 15.

It was your wish, Fabrizio, and I yielded to it. But it was not without repugnance I saw her go to this ball. You say your sister will watch over her; but I know Donna Clelia better than you. She has no eyes but for her own daughters, and will think she has done her duty to Ginevra by seeing, when she arrives, that her dress has not been crumpled on the way, and, at her return, that she has lost none of her ribbons. She will separate her from her own daughters, you may be sure, lest she eclipse them, and leave her alone—alone in the gay world where she appears for the first time. . . . You smiled when you saw her ready to start. You whispered with pride that a lovelier creature never was seen. . . . Ah! Fabrizio, at that moment how I wished she were less charming, or, at least, that her beauty could be hidden from every eye! . . .

Do you remember the assertion of a queen of France about which we were conversing only a few days since? You thought it too severe, but to me it only seems reasonable; for it gives expression to the most earnest wish of my heart. O yes! like her, I would rather see the child I love so passionately—a thousand times

rather—see her die than contract the slightest stain! . . .

The hours are passing away, and I must seek calmness in prayer. I feel as if in this way I shall still be able to protect her. . . .

Clelia promised to bring her home at eleven. The clock has just struck twelve, and she has not yet arrived. . . .

JUNE 25.

I have been ill for a few days past, and unable to write. To-day I feel somewhat better, and, though my mind has been greatly disturbed, will try to collect my thoughts.

I was not deceived in my presentiment. I thought the day of the ball would be a fatal one, and I was not mistaken. As I said, at midnight she had not returned. I awaited her arrival with increased anxiety of mind, lying awake a whole hour after that, listening to every sound, and repeatedly mistaking the noise of the sea for that of the carriage bringing her home. . . . At last, about half-past one, I heard the rumbling of the wheels, and presently recognized her light step in the gallery. She passed my door without stopping, and had arrived at her own chamber, when Ottavia, who had been sitting up with me, went after her to say I was not yet asleep, if she wished to come and bid me good-night. As she entered the door, the light in Ottavia's hand shone across her face. It was by no means the same as at her departure. The excitement of dancing, and the fatigue of remaining up to so unusual an hour, were doubtless sufficient to account for her disordered hair, her pale face, and the striking brilliancy of her eyes; but her troubled look, her trembling lips, and the care she took to avoid looking me in the face when she fell on my neck, showed

there was something more which I must wait till another day to question her about. . . .

JULY 1.

To continue the account interrupted the other day:

I know everything now, for she never deceives me. She is always as sincere as she is affectionate. Yes, she had scarcely entered the ball-room before she was, as I foretold, separated from her cousins, and left in a group of young ladies, who, treating her as a mere child, immediately proposed she should take a seat at a table where there were sweetmeats and games. Just then the orchestra began a dance, and the two oldest of the group stationed themselves in front to attract the attention of those in search of partners, while a third kept Ginevra in her seat by showing her pictures, and patronizingly promising in a whisper to dance with her presently. But at the sound of the music, Ginevra could not be restrained from springing up and advancing to look at the preparations for the dance. This change of position attracted the observation of a young gentleman who was slowly entering the room with an absent air without appearing to wish to take any part in the dance.

"There is Flavio Aldini," said one of the young ladies; "he will not condescend to come this way. He looks upon us as mere schoolgirls, and only dances with those ladies whose elegance has already made them the fashion."

"I never saw him before, but he looks very much as I supposed from the description I had of him. Is he not said to be engaged to a rich heiress?"

"He? No; he does not dream of marrying, I assure you. I tell you he never looks at us young ladies."

"And yet, my dear, he seems to be looking rather earnestly in this direction now."

She was right. At that very moment, the person of whom they were speaking eagerly approached the place where Ginevra was standing, and, without glancing at her companions, accosted her, begging she would give him the pleasure of being her partner in the quadrille about to begin.

This was a triumph for my poor Ginevra, and all the greater after the vexation caused by her companions' patronizing airs. She went away radiant—intoxicated. . . . Hitherto she had been petted as a child; now she suddenly realized how much admiration a woman can inspire, and this knowledge, like a mischievous spark, fell from the look and smile of Flavio Aldini into her very heart!

Flavio Aldini! You will understand, Fabrizio, the terror I felt at the mere name of this presuming fellow; so well calculated, alas! to please young eyes like hers, and capable of taking advantage of the impression he could not help seeing he had made on her inexperience. . . .

How agitated the poor child was in repeating all his dangerous compliments! And how flattering to her pride a success that attracted the attention of every one in the room, and made her an object of envy to those who had just humiliated her by their condescension! . . . I allowed her to go on. . . . I was glad, at all events, to see she did not manifest the least shade of deception—the usual consequence of vanity—but I trembled as I listened!

He begged for the little bunch of flowers she wore in her bosom. She was strongly tempted to grant

his request, and was only prevented from doing so by the fear of being observed.

JULY 5.

I have not been able to continue. I have been growing weaker and weaker, and can only write a few lines at a time without fatigue. Since the 15th of June, I have been constantly worried and anxious. I cannot bear for her to leave me now for a single instant. I want to keep her constantly under my eyes and near my heart. Yesterday I saw her start at the sound of a horse passing under the balcony. To-day she was standing there with her eyes dreamily turned towards the road that connects our house with the shore. . . . I called her, and she listened as I talked kindly to her, hoping to give a new turn to her thoughts, instead of trying to check them by remonstrances. She is easily influenced and guided by kindness but it is difficult to make her yield to authority. Oh! there never was a child who needed more than she the tender guidance of a mother! . . .

But let thy will, O God! be done. Help me to say this without a murmur. Let me not forget that my love for her is nothing—nothing at all—in comparison with that.

JULY 15.

It is only with great effort I can write to-day. I do not know as I shall be able to write more than a few lines. But I wish to remind you once more, Fabrizio, of the conversation we had yesterday evening. Who knows but it was the last we shall ever have in this world! My time here is short. Do not forget my request. Lose no time in uniting her to some one she can love and will consent to

The Veil Withdrawn.

be guided by. Though still young, he should be several years older than she, in order to inspire her with respect, which is so sweet when mingled with affection, as no one knows better than I, Fabrizio. Has not the mingled respect and love with which you have filled my heart constituted the happiness of my life? I would bless you once more for this, as I close. I have not strength enough to continue. . . . I must stop. . . . And yet I would speak once more of her—of my Ginevra—my darling child. I would implore you to be always mild and patient with her, and if ever. . . .

Here the journal ended! . . . Oh! what a torrent of recollections rushed across my mind at the sight of this unfinished page! This little book falling from her hand, . . .

her slumbers, . . . her terrible awakening, . . . her incoherent words, her last embrace, my despair! All this I recalled with poignant grief as I pressed my lips to the lines written by her dying hand. I shed a torrent of tears, but this time they were salutary tears. I had already severely expiated my error, for it was only my deep sorrow for having embittered the last hours of my mother's life, and perhaps, O fearful thought! of hastening her end, that had given so dark a shade to my grief, and filled me with a despair akin to madness. I was now stronger, calmer, and wiser, and felt I could yet repair my fault by fulfilling my mother's wishes, and this thought brought the first ray of comfort that penetrated my heart. I made many new resolutions in my mind, and felt I had firmness enough to keep them.

IV.

FROM that day I resumed my former habits, and, except the liveliness of my childhood, which had disappeared never to return, I became almost the same as before. This sudden and unhoped-for restoration brought cheerfulness once more to our gloomy house, and a ray of joy to the sad, anxious face of my father. I say anxious; for it was more so, if possible, than sad. There was an anxiety in his look, whenever he turned towards me, that was quite inexpressible. Had he so trembled for my life, and afterwards for my reason, as hardly to credit I was restored to him? Perhaps so; but if his anxiety had really outlived its cause, though that might explain his profound solicitude, it could not account for the coldness of manner he now manifested, instead of the warm affection to which he had accustomed me from infancy. And when I endeavored to fathom the cause of this change, only one reason occurred to me, which I repelled with terror, and on which my mind utterly refused to dwell! . . .

I had not seen my brother (the elder of the two children by my father's first marriage) since my illness. When I went to the supper-table for the first time, he was not there. But this did not cause me any great regret, for I feared Mario more than I loved him. I was glad, therefore, to find no one pre-

sent but my father, my sister Livia, and Ottavia, who, from a waiting-maid, had merited, from her long services, to be promoted to a duenna. I say *duenna*, and not governess; for she would scarcely have been able to teach us to read and write. But she knew many things much more important. She was one of those good, simple souls, so frequently met with in Italy among people of her station, uncultivated from a human point of view, but wonderfully conversant with everything relating to the principles of the Christian religion, the practice of charity, and the grandeur of the Christian's hopes. Sometimes thoughts came spontaneously from her heart and lips which were far more admirable than are to be found in any book. Therefore my father, notwithstanding her undeniable ignorance in many respects, did not consider her useless in the training of his children, but treated her with a consideration bordering on respect.

Hitherto my life had been surrounded by, and, so to speak, permeated with a mother's love; and when I was suddenly deprived of this light and warmth, an overpowering grief, as has been related, took possession of my soul, which at first it seemed impossible I could survive. Now I was calmer; but there was still a void, a wretchedness, a grief in my heart, which,

though not as violent as at first, had become fixed and permanent. I thought sometimes of young birds, whose mothers had been caught in the fowler's net, left pining alone in their nests, or of poor little fish drawn out of the water and left on the shore in the heat of the sun. I seemed to be like them: my heart and soul were out of their element and deprived of their necessary food.

In this state, Ottavia and my kind sister Livia were the only persons in the house who afforded me any comfort. I always sought shelter beside them; for the sight of my father increased my depression, and I was afraid of my brother's stern and penetrating eye.

Mario, at this time, was twenty-seven years of age. He was remarkably handsome at first sight; but his stern, gloomy face, seldom expressive of kindness, and never of affection, greatly modified this first impression, and it was nearly impossible to feel entirely at ease with him. Nevertheless, he had many noble qualities, and in some respects resembled my father; but he had not inherited his kindness of heart. . . . My brother was unyielding and jealous, and, if not bad at heart, at least had an unpleasant disposition, and was often in an insupportable humor. He made me habitually feel that he regarded me as the child of a different mother, and could not forgive Livia, who was his own sister, for loving one who, according to him, had come to rob them of the full share of their father's love.

At the time of Fabrizio dei Monti's second marriage, Mario, then only twelve years old, had manifested so great a repugnance to it, and so much ill-will towards her who was about to take his mother's

place at their fireside, that Fabrizio decided to send him away; and for several years Mario lived away from home, only returning from time to time for an occasional visit. It was only within a year he had become a permanent member of the household. At that time the malady that was to prove fatal to my mother had begun its ravages, and the remaining days of her life were already numbered. Whether it was this knowledge, or because he was softened and disarmed by the charm of her beauty and the angelic sweetness of her manner, it is certain he became quite a different person, and, in her presence at least, was never harsh or severe towards us. Perhaps this change would have been complete could he have remained longer under the sweet influence we were all so unhappily deprived of!

On the 15th of July—the day that ended so fatally—Mario was absent. He had left home the evening before, and, when he returned, he learned, at the same time, the calamity that had occurred and that which so speedily threatened to follow. I have been assured that he manifested a lively grief at my mother's death, and had inquired about me, not only with interest, but even with anxiety. But the recollections of the past were still vividly impressed on my memory, and it was not to him my heavy, bleeding heart turned for consolation at such a time.

At the end of our gloomy repast, my sister was informed that there were several visitors in the drawing-room. It was the hour when my father received his friends and the clients he had not been able to see in the morning. Livia immediately left the table, and I was about to follow her, when my father

stopped me, and kept me beside him till he had looked over some documents which had just been brought him. He then gave me his arm to the *salon*. This was certainly done with kindness and an air of affection, but with a kind of gravity constantly perceptible as he kept me beside him the remainder of the evening. How gladly I would have exchanged this affectionate solicitude, that could not lose sight of me, for one such look as I used to receive! . . .

It was strange! but when I thought of my mother, no remorse was mingled with so affecting a remembrance. I felt as if a constant communication was maintained between her soul and mine; that she *saw* my repentance, was aware of my resolutions, and, to sum up my impressions—childish, perhaps, but so lively and profound that they have never been effaced—that *peace had been made between us*. But the thought that my father might be aware of all that took place during that hour of fearful memory, or the possibility of his knowing the foolish act I committed in my mother's presence, alas! while she was dying, and that he might attribute the dreadful catastrophe that followed to that act, inspired me with genuine terror, which was only checked by a secret, constant conviction that my mother had not been able, during the few short hours of the following night, to divulge my secret to any one, even to him. But then, who could have told him, or what other reason could there be for the change that made me feel as if I had lost my father as well as my mother, and that the heavens were darkened on that side also?

The next day I was alone in my chamber, collecting my books

in order to resume my studies, as if my mother were still alive to direct me, when my sister came in breathless, as if from running. She stopped to take breath, and locked the door before speaking.

Livia was two years younger than her brother. She was not handsome; but her form was noble and graceful, her eyes were strikingly beautiful, and her smile, though somewhat sad, was incomparably sweet. But a nose somewhat too long, a chin a little too short, and thick hair parted on a forehead a little too low, made her rather unattractive at the first glance, and perhaps caused the absurd notion I shall soon have occasion to refer to. But all who knew Livia regarded her as an angel of goodness, and forgot the defects of her face.

"Gina!" she hurriedly exclaimed, as soon as she could speak, "my dear little Gina! Mario has returned, and is coming up to see you. Listen to me," embracing me as she continued. "I think he means to tell you something that will distress you—something I wish you could remain for ever ignorant of. But it is useless. He is determined you shall know it, and, after all, it may be as well. Only, *carina*, promise to be calm. If he scolds you, or speaks in his usual severe way, do not answer him. Control yourself. Let him go on, Gina mia! I beg of you. No matter if he distresses you for a moment; he will soon go away, and I will console you. . . ."

I had no time to answer these incoherent supplications, for at that very instant I heard my brother's steps in the gallery. He stopped at my door, and, finding it fastened, gave a low knock.

"You need not worry," I whispered to Livia. "Remain here,

and I will do as you wish, I assure you."

Livia embraced me once more, and then opened the door. Mario entered. I advanced to greet him, and then stopped with surprise at seeing him so pale and altered. He looked as if he had been ill also. Neither of us spoke for a moment, for he likewise seemed to be astonished at my appearance. He must, indeed, have found me greatly changed since he last saw me. I had grown so tall during my illness that my face was nearly on a level with his, and the long black dress I wore made me appear even taller than I really was. I had lost the freshness of my complexion. The thick, fair hair of which I had been so proud no longer shaded my face, but was drawn back from my forehead, and confined under a black net. He had no reason now to chide me for too much attention to my appearance. He could not make any cutting jests about my hair, as he used to when I arranged it like a crown on my brow, or left it in long curls at the caprice of the wind, according to the whim of my vanity. He had left me a child—a child wilful and full of freaks, whom he only noticed in order to correct for some fault. He found me a young lady, whose sad, distressed, and somewhat austere look seemed the very reverse of the picture left in his memory. He seemed affected to find me so changed, and held out his hand with a cordiality much more affectionate than usual. Then, after a moment's silence, he said with a kindness he had never before manifested :

" You have passed through a great trial, my poor Ginevra. I have felt for you, and participated in your grief, I assure you."

I was touched by these words,

and was about to reply, when he resumed :

" Yes, you have suffered, I see; but it seems also to have been a great benefit to you."

My heart was ready to burst, and I at once drew myself up : " Benefit to lose my mother! O Mario! how can you say so?"

He frowned. " I do not mean in that sense, Ginevra, as you must be aware. But perhaps I am mistaken," he continued, resuming his ordinary tone, which I only remembered too well. " It may be you have only changed exteriorly. I hope it is otherwise, my dear sister, and that your childish vanity and foolish coquetry . . ."

" Mario!" murmured Livia in a beseeching tone, scarcely raising her eyes from her work. This exclamation escaped her almost involuntarily; for she knew better than any one else that the least reply only acted as a stimulant when he was inclined to be ill-humored or angry. Therefore this slight interruption only served to make him continue in a louder tone.

" Yes, it is possible her coquettish disposition may not be overcome, and it would not be right to spare it. I am only acting as a friend by speaking plainly about the misfortunes it has caused."

O merciful heavens! . . . Did he know my fearful secret, and was he about to tell me what I dreaded more than anything else in the world to hear? My heart throbbed violently, but I breathed once more when he added :

" Thank God, Ginevra, in the midst of your tears, for having taken your mother out of the world without the least suspicion of your behavior."

Though these words allayed my chief anxiety, they seemed far more

insulting than I merited. A flush rose to my cheeks, and I haughtily drew up my head, as I replied : "I never concealed anything in my life from my mother, Mario. And now she is gone, who alone had the right to admonish me, it belongs to my father, and not to you, I beg you to remember, my dear brother."

I sat down and leaned my head against my hand, that he might not perceive the heart-felt anguish he had caused me. I was by no means prepared for what followed.

"You are mistaken, my charming little sister," he said in a cool, ironical tone; "and it is well to tell you, as you seem to be ignorant of it, that when young ladies play a game that endangers their reputation and the honor of the name they bear, they often oblige their brothers to take a part in it."

Notwithstanding my folly and defects, I was really nothing but a child at that time, and his words conveyed no definite meaning to my mind. I turned around and looked him in the face with an air of surprise that showed I did not comprehend him. The eyes that met mine were no longer full of mockery, but sad and stern.

"Look at that, sister," he said in a grave tone, throwing on the table a small paper package that was sealed. "The contents of that paper may recall a circumstance you seem to have forgotten, and perhaps make you understand my meaning."

I hesitated a moment. I was afraid without knowing why. But finally I took up the paper, and tore open the wrapper. A withered flower fell out, which I gazed at with surprise, but without the slightest recollection.

"Do you not recognize it?"

I shook my head.

"Nevertheless, that flower came from your hands."

I shuddered. He continued in the bitterest tone :

"It is true it was then red, . . . red as the blood that had to be shed to restore it to you."

The horror with which I was filled at these words struck me dumb. I clasped my icy hands, and turned deadly pale, without the power of uttering a word ! Livia sprang from her seat.

"Mario, you have no heart, or soul, or mercy ! Go away. It was not your place to tell her about this misfortune."

But Mario, excited as usual by contradiction, continued without any circumlocution, and even more violently than before.

"No, no. It is better for Ginevra to learn the truth from my lips ; for I am the only person that dares tell her the real state of the case. And I will do it without any disguise, for it may cure her. She shall listen to what I have to say. It will do her good. And I shall conceal nothing . . ."

I will not repeat the words that fell from his lips like a torrent of fire ! . . . Besides, I can only recall their import. All I can remember is that they met the very evening of that fatal day—where and how I do not recollect. Flavio was talking to several other young men, and, without observing Mario's presence, insolently mentioned my name. My brother snatched the carnation from his button-hole. The next day the encounter took place. . . .

I felt ready to drop with fright and horror. "Oh!" I said in a stifled voice, "can it be that my brother has killed Flavio Aldini with his own hand? O my God! my God! My punishment is greater than I deserve !"

"No, no," he eagerly replied, "it was not I who . . ." He stopped, . . . and then continued in a calmer tone, but somewhat bitterly :

"Compose yourself, dear sister; it was my blood alone that was shed in this encounter."

"May God forgive me!" I shudderingly exclaimed with the fervent, sincere piety I always manifested with the simplicity of childhood. "And may he forgive you, too, Mario; for you likewise have committed a deed forbidden by God."

A faint smile hovered on Mario's lips, but it immediately gave way to a graver expression; for notwithstanding his defects, he was by no means disposed to be impious.

"Forbidden by God! That is true, Ginevra; but it is, I would hope, a deed he sometimes excuses, especially when the person insulted gets the worst of the encounter."

As he said this, he put his hand to his breast, as if suffering from pain. I was again struck with his extreme paleness, as well as other traces of illness in his altered appearance, and was penetrated with shame and

remorse. A feeling more akin to affection than I had ever felt for him sprang up in my heart, and I said to him humbly :

"Mario, you have done right to be plain with me, and I thank you. What you have said will, I trust, effect my entire cure. At any rate, you have done your duty."

He had never known me to yield to him before. I had always revolted against his ill-humor and harshness, whether just or not, and sometimes replied with an impertinence that justified his resentment. He was touched at seeing me in this new attitude, and, for the first time in his life, clasped me in his arms and kissed me with real affection. He then left the room, making a sign for Livia to follow him. She did so, but returned in a few minutes. Tears were in her eyes, and her lips were slightly tremulous—a sure indication in her of some sudden and profound emotion.

Mario had not told me everything. His anger had died away, and he left it for kinder lips than his to communicate the rest.

v.

The affliction and repentance that so speedily followed the brief moment when I saw Flavio Aldini for the last time seemed to have effaced the transient impression produced at our only meeting, as a stream, suddenly swelled by a storm, washes away every trace left on the sand. I should have met him again with indifference, and perhaps even with aversion; for he would have been always associated with the first misfortune and first remorse of my life. Nevertheless, when Livia, after considerable hesitation, uttered the words, "Flavio

Aldini is dead," a cry almost of despair escaped from my lips; and the horrible thought at once occurred to me that Mario had deceived me—that he was the murderer, and that this flower, a thousand times abhorred, had cost the life of him who had obtained it through my vanity and thoughtlessness! . . .

The terrible lesson I had already received was not, however, to be carried to such an extent; but it was some minutes before I could be convinced of it. Livia herself had some difficulty in clearly relating the account she was charged

with. At length I comprehended that Flavio, while pursuing a successful career of pleasure, was no less careful to improve every opportunity of repairing the inroads made on his fortune. Among these was the proposal to marry a wealthy heiress, which he acceded to without any scruple. But though he thus triumphed over a large number of suitors by means of his good looks and captivating manners, it was, in his eyes, only a lucky bargain and another light vow. He had been engaged only a few days, and the marriage was about to be publicly announced, when he met me at the ball. The sight of a new young face, and especially the *naïve* inexperience of a girl it would be easy to dazzle, inspired the wish to try his power once more. But he had been followed to the ball-room, and watched, by one of the unsuccessful suitors of the beautiful heiress. His encounter with Mario a few days after confirmed his rival's suspicions, and afforded him a pretext for gratifying his hatred and jealousy. Consequently, when Flavio, after leaving Mario wounded on the field, returned to the villa he occupied at a short distance from Messina, he found a new opponent to bring him to an account for his faithlessness to his betrothed, on the plea of a distant relationship that gave him the right to declare himself her champion. In this second duel, fortune was adverse to Flavio. He lived several weeks, however, and had only died that very morning from the effects of his wounds! . . . The news had just arrived . . . And this was what Livia had been commissioned to tell me of. . . .

If it is true that our souls are like precious stones, that only reveal all

their brilliancy after much cutting and polishing, it is certain that for both the first blow must be the most trying. . . . My soul, over which my mother had watched, and which she said was dearer to her than her own life, or even than mine, was now undergoing this painful process; or, rather, had undergone it. But during the last hour, it was no longer the knife, but fire, that had been applied to my bleeding heart!

Though I had no direct cause for self-reproach concerning this new catastrophe, as I at first feared, I did not feel myself wholly irresponsible. This was sufficient to deepen the solemn gravity of my reflections, in which I remained absorbed so long—motionless and silent—that poor Livia was seriously alarmed.

“ Speak to me, Gina, I implore you. Oh! why, tell me why, *carina*, you have kept all this secret from your poor sister? Who could have dreamed you loved this unfortunate man; that you loved any one unbeknown to us all? Could we imagine such a thing possible? You know, dear child, I have never found fault with you, and I will not now. So tell me if it is true that you eluded the vigilance of your mother and Ottavia, in order to meet Flavio in the garden? Was it there you gave him the flower you wore in your hair? And is it true that more than once . . .”

Excessive surprise completely roused me from my stupor, and I eagerly interrupted her with a face as red as fire:

“ Never! never! never! . . .” I exclaimed in a tone that would have convinced the most incredulous, if it had the indubitable accent of truth. “ I did not love Flavio Aldini, and I never met him alone in my life.”

Livia, in her turn, looked at me with astonishment. "Did not love him? Never met him alone? Never gave him a bouquet or a single flower?"

"I will tell you the truth, Livia: once, and then I did not speak to him, I threw him from a distance the carnation I wore in my hair."

"Once? From a distance? Ah! then tell me when and where you did it?"

I made no reply. A thousand thoughts flashed across my mind with the rapidity of lightning. . . . It was evident that, by some wonderful chance, no one knew exactly what had taken place. A vague story had been circulated, founded on Flavio's exaggerated boasts. My father, brother, and sister had accepted this version—so far from the truth—without understanding the real extent of that which had been alleged against me. I felt that they considered me guiltier than I really was. And yet I would not have undeceived them for anything in the world. They judged me more severely than I deserved, but of what consequence was it? Was I not sufficiently culpable to accept this injustice with humility? Was it not enough, without complaining of anything else, to be at last assured that my secret was safe with my mother in heaven? Ought I not rather to bear all their reproaches without a murmur? There was only one that would have overwhelmed me, and that I was spared. All others were easy to bear, and, moreover, were merited by what they were ignorant of, if not by what they supposed true.

Livia patiently waited for me to break my long silence.

"You know I am incapable of telling you an untruth," I said to her at last.

"Yes, and therefore I always believe you."

"Well, then, I implore you to believe me now, Livia, without asking me anything more. And, moreover," I added in a supplicating tone, "do not repeat what I have just told you, and make no effort to justify me to any one."

My good sister looked at me attentively for a moment, and then gently drew my head against her shoulder.

"Poor Gina!" she said. "It shall be as you wish. I believe everything you say, and love you too well to annoy you with any more questions."

Livia knew me thoroughly; for, notwithstanding her apparent simplicity, she had an eye that could read one's soul. She saw the sincerity and repentance of mine, and read in my pale face and distressed look the extent of my sufferings, and her kind heart melted. . . . I was, indeed, very young to experience such a variety of emotions, and was still too weak to endure them. The habit of duelling, so unfortunately prevalent in Sicily, had, of course, accustomed me more than would have been the case anywhere else to occurrences similar to that I had just heard about. But to have my name connected with so fatal an affair; to feel that I was the cause of the blood shed in one of these encounters, and that the other had resulted in the tragical end of one who had flashed for an instant across my path, like one of those meteors that are the ominous fore-runners of misfortune and death, . . . was more than my young heart and feeble frame could endure. Livia perceived it.

"Come, *carina*," she said, "lean against me. You need rest."

I attempted to make my way to

an old sofa, covered with red damask, at the other end of the vast and scantily-furnished room; but I had no sooner risen than my strength failed me, and I was obliged to lean against a table to keep myself from falling. Livia hastened to procure some cold water, with which she sprinkled my face. I soon recovered, but was still pale and agitated when Ottavia came in. She had left me quite well an hour before, and, finding me now in such a state, she exclaimed with mingled impatience and alarm as she advanced: "Good heavens! what has happened to her? She was so well this morning." . . . And giving Livia a furtive, distrustful glance, she extended the index and little finger

of her hand, closing all the others; turning around as she made this gesture, the meaning of which is only too well known in our country.* This was done so quickly that I hoped I was the only one to perceive it.

"How foolish!" I angrily exclaimed to Ottavia, seizing her hand and covering it with mine. "Are you going to treat me always as if I were an invalid or an old woman? *Thanks to Livia*"—and I emphasized these words—"I have entirely recovered."

Ottavia, half angry, half sorry, was about to go away; but Livia made a sign for her to remain, and, pressing my hand as she embraced me once more, left the room without uttering a word.

VI.

The little incident I have just related will doubtless excite some astonishment, and be regarded as scarcely confirming what I have said before about Ottavia's piety and good sense. But whoever has lived in the southern part of Italy knows there are hundreds of people in that region whose education, and even religious instruction, are in no way deficient, and who, nevertheless, are not exempt from the singular superstition I have just referred to.

I leave it to the erudite to prove that Magna Græcia derived it from classical Greece, the mother country; that remote antiquity made use of the same absurd gesture to avert the effects of what it was still more absurd to believe; and that in those days, as well as now, people multiplied this very sign under the form of protective amulets—not only as jewels to be worn, but in the objects that surrounded them.

I likewise leave to them the task of explaining why this evil has resisted the influence of time and the progress of civilization, as well as the spirit of Christianity. All that can be said, it seems to me, is that in those regions this superstition takes the place of all those that abound in the North of Europe, and from which Italy is exempt. For instance, we do not hear people there, as in Ireland, Scotland, and Sweden, talk of strange, weird apparitions, fairies, or malign spirits, under the name of bogies or ban-shees. They are not afraid, as in Russia, of meeting people clothed in black, of the number thirteen, and a thousand other absurd notions which Catholicism has condemned without being able to eradicate, and which Protestantism has

* It is well known that the people of Southern Italy think they can, by this gesture, avert the effects of the *jettatura*, or evil eye, which they attribute to some persons.

been much more powerless against. Nor are the ruins, as in Germany, associated with wild legends or haunted by spirits. But, to make up for all this, the jettatura holds there its baleful sway. Though frequently ridiculed, it is feared more than any one is willing to admit; and there is no one, even among the most reasonable, who would suffer this dreaded epithet to be applied to himself, or any one he loved, without manifesting his displeasure. It would be impossible to account for the cause of this prejudicial notion in individual cases, or explain why this fearful term is sometimes applied to men of special merit, and women who are young, lovely, and amiable, as well as to those whom a pretext is wanted to avoid, or whose appearance has something repugnant. Sometimes it is sufficient that a person has accidentally witnessed some misfortune, and, if the same thing is known to occur again, the word escapes from the lips, flies from mouth to mouth, and the foolish prejudice is established. This had been the case with poor Livia. An accident once happened to me in my childhood when she was with me; shortly after, she was present when another occurred to one of our young friends; and a third time, she happened, in one of her charitable rounds, to be in the house of a poor man at the time of his death. This was spoken of at first as a mere jest; but it gradually became a source of mortification and humiliation to her, though none of us were ever allowed to make the least allusion to it in her presence. The repeated troubles of the past few weeks had disturbed the faithful Ottavia's equilibrium and good sense to such an unusual degree that when she found me, pale

and agitated, leaning on my sister's shoulder, the first thought inspired by her terror caused her instantly to make this involuntary gesture.

I was so vexed at this occurrence that for a moment I forgot everything else. I felt angry with Ottavia, and threw myself on the old sofa without speaking, in a fit of mingled sorrow and displeasure.

I had always been fond of Livia, and now all the repressed and pent-up tenderness of my heart was poured out on her. She seemed to be the only person in the world that still loved me—the only one that stood between me and what appeared like a great void. Yes, my mother was right in what she said about the great necessity of my nature. As a flower dies, deprived of the sun, so without affection I should soon cease to exist. I placed no reliance on the durability of that which my brother had just manifested. As to my father, his love seemed extinct in comparison with that of former times. And now that I knew the reason of his coldness and severity, I had no hope of overcoming them; for I felt sure he would less readily excuse the truth, were it revealed to him, than the error which had caused such a change in his manner.

Therefore for any one to wound the feelings of Livia, my darling sister, my indulgent and faithful friend, was at this time like piercing my very heart. I remained with my head on the cushions of the old sofa, while Ottavia was bustling about the chamber, as if trying to divert my attention from what had taken place. At last she approached and tried to get hold of my hand. I withdrew it.

"Come, dear signorina," she said, "forgive your poor old Ottavia. I did wrong."

"Yes, very wrong, Ottavia," I replied in a tone almost severe.

"I know it, and feel as if I were listening to the blessed spirit of Donna Bianca herself when I hear you and see you! You resemble her so much, signorina! . . ."

"Well, Ottavia, what would she say to you, if she had been present?"

"She would tell me that my fear of the jettatura is both foolish and wrong; and that is only what I know myself, what I believe and realize when I am on my knees before God! . . . Oh! at such times I really feel that his will alone is everywhere accomplished; I only love that holy will; I am afraid of nothing, because I am convinced that will must prevail. And yet, after all, . . . when my dear signorina seems to be in danger, or I imagine some one is going to bring her ill-luck. . . ."

"Ottavia! . . . Ottavia!" . . . I cried, suddenly interrupting her with an outburst that almost frightened her, "it is I, it is I, and not she, who bring ill-luck to all I approach. . . ."

I burst into tears as I spoke. This sudden return upon myself effaced, with the mobility of youth, the impression previously received, and brought back, to my confusion and remorse, all the reality of the present.

Ottavia, like the rest, had been told of my supposed fault, and was ignorant of what I had really done; but she was by no means in a mood now to add any reproaches to those I had already received from my brother. On the contrary, she tried to soothe me, not by any direct reply, but by speaking of that which she could talk best about. I had always been more or less piously inclined from

my earliest childhood. How could it be otherwise under the excellent influence that had hitherto been the life of my life? . . . This piety did not obliterate my faults, but it existed in spite of them, and was to exist through all the perils reserved for me in the future. But it was, if I may so speak, intermittent. Sometimes it grew dormant, if not absolutely extinct; at other times it was kindled to a lively and ardent degree. Therefore I frequently recited my catechism with indifference and *ennui*; but when it was explained by Ottavia in her peculiar way; when she spoke of the sacraments, or dwelt on the life and sufferings of our Saviour, and more especially on the life to come, I was filled with delight. The loveliness of the natural world around me seemed to assume an additional charm; and when I considered that this was only a faint image of a far more beautiful realm I longed at once to exchange this life for the other. . . .

It was by such means the good Ottavia now gently endeavored to divert me, by speaking of God, of heaven, and various other sacred topics. By degrees she came back to more indifferent subjects, and finally to Livia, promising to make her forget the mortification she had experienced, and almost persuading me she had not perceived what had taken place.

I allowed her to talk on in this way without interruption until her somewhat monotonous tone produced a drowsiness that was beneficial to my over-excited nerves. As soon as she saw my eyes grow heavy, she placed one of the large sofa-cushions under my head, closed the window-shutters to exclude the dazzling light, and then, after remaining beside me till she was per-

suaed I was fast asleep, softly left the chamber.

I was not, however, asleep. But my attitude and the profound silence and solitude of the room were very soothing, and I remained a long time absorbed in a thousand complex thoughts. Long years have passed away since that day, and other and more dangerous temptations have assailed me, but I have never forgotten the reflections of that hour. My vanity had been for ever shattered like the congealed surface of some deep lake by some sudden blow. It had not really been a part of my inner nature, but rather on the surface, and therefore not the most dangerous trait of my character. During the remainder of my life, I can only recall a single hour—and *only one!* . . . when it again blinded me. . . . But that hour was long after the one of which I have been speaking. At this time I could say with assurance that Mario's wish was fulfilled—that I was effectually and radically cured of my vanity. Associated with so many poignant recollections, it had become horrible in my eyes.

My health was somewhat affected by the agitation I had undergone, and I took advantage of this to remain several days in my room, only leaving it to take the air on the terrace. I only saw my father for a moment, morning and night. The remainder of the day I passed with Livia. Whether she had forgotten what had distressed me so much, or it was owing to her self-control, or she really had not noticed it, it was impossible to tell from her manner, and I finally persuaded myself it was as I hoped.

Livia, in spite of her amiable disposition, had great firmness of character. She never allowed herself to be induced to tell anything

she wished to conceal, or to do what was forbidden by others or by her own judgment. But what especially characterized her was her self-forgetfulness. This did not strike me at that time. When one is only fifteen years of age, one receives impressions without defining them : one is repelled or attracted by certain natures without being able to analyze them. But in looking back, not only over the events of my past life, but what transpired in the inner folds of my conscience, I clearly see the difference between my sister's nature and mine. From her very childhood she had lived a life of self-forgetfulness (sublime and simple way to heights but little known!), regardless of her own tastes and inclinations, and even of her own sufferings. Whereas, I was constantly endeavoring to fathom the workings of my heart and soul and mind, and to find food for them, as one tries to appease one's hunger and thirst when importunate. Not but that I was capable of forgetting myself, and, so to speak, of being absorbed in the heart of another, as I had been in that of my mother, but solely on the condition of being to that other, in return, the object of an infinite pre-dilection ; . . . for this word of such vast import does not seem to express more than my heart craved. But in spite of this difference, or rather on the very account of it, Livia and I were always at ease with each other, and it was not without regret I was at last obliged to resume my usual life. I regretted this the more because it had been regulated by my father in a way that indicated only too plainly how much he distrusted me. Nevertheless, I submitted with humility and docility to this unaccustomed *surveillance*, the cause of which was so evident.

I was only released from it during the early hours of the day, which I spent in my chamber with Livia. I was not allowed to go into the garden, except under Ottavia's escort; and I was not permitted to leave the house, unless accompanied by my father or Mario. All the rest of my time I passed in my father's cabinet, where he had a table placed for me near his own. There, for hours together, I read, wrote, or worked, varying my occupations according to my own tastes, but without any other liberty. To have passed my days in this way beside my father would have been delightful once; but now, though he was often kind and affectionate, there was a certain gravity in his affection that made me feel I was the object of unjust suspicion, and tortured me beyond expression. But I submitted to this torture without a murmur, acknowledging, as I did so, that it was only a merited chastisement.

This cabinet was like a vast hall in form, and, like all the other rooms of that old palace, grand in its proportions, but only furnished with what was absolutely essential. One side of the apartment was entirely lined with shelves filled with books and papers, and at each extremity stood a row of arm-chairs. In the middle of the room, opposite two large windows, was my father's writing-table, near which was mine. Between the windows hung a large painting, which was the only ornament in the room; but, to compensate for this, the garden could be seen, and further off, beyond the verdure of the orange-trees, stretched the blue outline of the sea.

My father received many of his friends and clients in the morning, but seldom admitted any of them

into the room we occupied. A servant half opened the door to announce the visitors' names, and my father went into the adjoining room to receive them. It was only on special occasions he gave orders for any one to be admitted where we were.

During the long hours I was thus left alone, I sometimes busily employed my time, but more frequently remained with my arms folded, plunged in a profound reverie. At such times I always avoided looking at the large painting that hung on the opposite panel between the two windows. This was a fine copy of Herodias' Daughter, by Guido, the original of which I afterwards saw in the Palazzo Corsini, at Rome. The sweet, charming face of the girl who is holding with a smile the bleeding head of S. John had a kind of fascination for me. It seemed like the personification of vanity in a new form, giddy and thoughtless in its course and fatal in its results, and often inspired me with many silent, gloomy reflections. . . . I preferred looking at the foliage of the orange-trees in the garden below, or gazing into the blue, illimitable heavens above. I often amused myself, likewise, before a cage, prettily painted and gilded, that hung in one of the windows, and contained a bird whose company was a great diversion in the life of disguised punishment I was condemned to. This bird, whose melody surpassed that of the nightingale in sweetness and power, was one of those called at Sorrento, where they are chiefly found, the *passero solitario*. I was so fond of its sweet music that my father had allowed me to hang the cage here, and more than once in the day I climbed up on a bench in the embrasure of the window to

see there was no lack of the singularly copious and solid food which this bird of angelic notes daily requires.

One day, while I was thus perched at a considerable height from the floor, the door opened much wider than usual, and the old servant that announced the visitors said with a certain emphasis: "His Excellency the Duca di Valenzano."

My first thought was to descend from the post I occupied; but before I had time to do so, the visitor entered the room, and stood regarding me with an air of surprise. My father rose to meet so unexpected a client; but the latter held out his hand to aid me in my descent, and followed me with his eyes, without speaking, as I hastily regained my usual seat, blushing with confusion. My father conducted him to the other end of the room, where stood the row of arm-chairs, and both took seats. During the long conversation that followed, I could only hear the tones of their voices as they rose and fell. Sometimes my father's predominated, and at other times the deep, sonorous voice of his visitor. I saw it was a question of business, for my father rose several times to search for different papers among the books arranged on the shelves of the library. Finally the conversation ended, and the new client proceeded to-

wards the door. But when he arrived opposite the cage where my bird was singing, he said: "Really, one's ears are charmed here no less than one's eyes. It seems more like a palace of fairies than a rendezvous for all the contentions of Sicily. . . ."

He was then standing directly before me.

"Don Fabrizio," continued he, "is not this your daughter, Donna Ginevra, of whom I have so often heard? Do me the favor of presenting me to her."

My father's face assumed a severe, dissatisfied expression, and mine was covered with a livelier blush than before. "Heard of me so often?" Alas! he had probably heard me spoken unfavorably of! Perhaps this was the very thought that clouded my father's brow. Nevertheless, after a moment's hesitation, he said: "Rise, Ginevra, and pay your respects to the Duca di Valenzano."

I rose, but without uttering a word; for I was disconcerted by the fixed, scrutinizing eye that seemed trying to read my face. I lowered my eyes, without being able to distinguish the features of this new acquaintance. I only remarked that he was tall, and had a noble air, in spite of his peculiar garb, that made him look more like a travelling artist than a person of high rank.

VII.

LORENZO, DUCA DI VALENZANO, belonged to one of the noblest families of upper Italy; but his mother was a native of Sicily, and it was from her he inherited his title as well as the fortune already in his possession, which would be considerably increased if an important lawsuit (the usual accompaniment of a Sicilian inheritance), which brought a great part of it into litigation, should terminate successfully. His object in coming to see my father was to place this business in his hands; and, after his first visit, he usually came once or twice a week. At first he merely bowed to me as he passed, or, at most, addressed me a few words on leaving the room. The remainder of the time was spent in looking over voluminous documents with my father. Nevertheless, these visits soon became a little incident in my monotonous life, and I began to look forward to them with a certain impatience.

The duke, at this time, was scarcely more than thirty years of age; but he by no means seemed young in my eyes. A few premature wrinkles and an observant, thoughtful look imparted a gravity to his face which was not, however, its prevailing expression; for it was frequently ironical and sarcastic to the last degree, and so mobile that it was not always easy to decide on the impression it left. His general appearance, however, was noble and striking, as well as the tone

of his voice, which involuntarily commanded attention to all he said.

Several weeks elapsed without any other variety than the few moments, more or less prolonged, which he passed at my table at the end of each visit. He generally made some unimportant remarks respecting my lessons, my bird, or my flowers, which he noticed I cultivated with a care somewhat unusual in our clime. In fact, he only spoke to me as he would to a child. I replied in a corresponding tone, and, very soon, not only without embarrassment, but with a pleasure I made no attempt to conceal. I had begun to be devoured by *ennui* in so inactive and solitary a life, and I eagerly welcomed any diversion that came in my way. My father, at such times, remained silent and grave, and seemed somewhat impatient when these brief conversations were prolonged a little more than usual.

One day, when the duke approached my table as usual, I had a large atlas open before me, and he noticed that I was examining the map of Asia. I was studying without any effort, and yet with a certain interest resulting from curiosity which, added to an excellent memory, made me an unusually good scholar. The duke looked at the map a moment, and, after some observations that excited my interest, he pointed to a place near

the Himalaya mountains, and remarked : "One year ago to-day I was there." I knew his extensive travels had rendered him celebrated, as well as his success as a sculptor, doubly surprising in a man of his rank and so enterprising an explorer. I had acquired this information from conversations respecting the duke since his arrival at Messina, where his presence had caused a sensation.

On this occasion, seeing my interest strongly excited, he seemed to take pleasure in giving an account of that remote region, which I sometimes interrupted by questions that appeared to surprise him. The facility with which I was endowed made me really superior in many respects to most girls of my age; and as for information, I might have been considered a phenomenon in my own country.

The conversation that day might have been indefinitely prolonged had not my father found a pretext for abridging it by suddenly proposing to take the duke to the further end of the garden, in order to examine some ruins and a Greek portico on a height from which there was an admirable view. The duke looked at me, as if he wished I could join in the walk ; but my father not seconding this mute suggestion, he was forced to accompany him, not, however, without giving me, as he left the room, a look that seemed to express compassion, interest, and respect.

As soon as I was alone, I abruptly closed my atlas, rose from my seat, and abandoned myself to a violent fit of irritation and grief, as I hurried with long steps through the extensive gallery, exclaiming aloud against the undue sternness and severity of my father.... He did not see that he was thus rendering

the seclusion he had imposed upon me beyond my strength to bear—a seclusion that would have been transformed by one word of affection, sympathy, or even kindness. Instead of this, did he not even appear to be annoyed that I should receive any from this stranger ?

It was impossible for me to resume my studies. I had an hour to wait before Ottavia would come, as she did every day, to accompany me to the garden—as if I were a mere child, instead of being allowed to wander at my own pleasure till sunset. Hitherto I had endured everything humbly ; but my patience was now exhausted, and I felt a disposition to revolt which I only repressed with difficulty. Was this merely against a *régime* of such excessive severity, or was it the result of a slight return of confidence in myself inspired by the interest, and almost deference, which this stranger had just manifested ? It was doubtless both ; and the consequence was, I felt an agitation I could not subdue, and an irrepressible longing for any change whatever in a mode of life that had become insupportable. Tired of walking up and down, I at last took a seat by the window, where I could, at a distance, see my father and his client. I watched them with an attention that soon diverted my thoughts and ended by wholly absorbing me.

I at once noticed that, instead of proceeding to the end of the garden to see the ruin my father had spoken of, they had stopped in a broad alley leading from the house to a white marble basin, in the form of a vase, which stood in the centre. This alley, bordered with a clipped hedge of box, extended beyond the basin to a small grove of olive-trees leading to the hill it was necessary

to ascend in order to see the ruin. They seemed to have wholly lost sight of the proposed object of their walk; for when I first saw them, they had scarcely reached the basin, and were now slowly returning towards the house. The duke appeared to be listening to my father, every now and then striking the hedge they were passing with a stick he held in his hand. All at once he stopped, and, passing his arm through my father's, he led him to a bench, on which they both sat down. I could see them distinctly, and, without hearing what they said, could distinguish the sound of their voices. It was the duke's I now heard. At first he spoke with his head bent down, as if with some hesitation, but by degrees with more animation and fire, and finally with clasped hands, as if pleading some cause or asking some favor. . . . Once he raised his eyes towards the window where I was, though he could not see me. Was he speaking of me? . . . Had he ventured to intercede in my behalf? . . . I looked at my father anxiously. His face expressed the greatest surprise as well as extreme dissatisfaction, but it gradually changed. He became very attentive; and when at last the duke extended his hand, he took it in his, and seemed to be making some promise. Then they rose and resumed the way to the house, but by a shady path where my eyes could no longer follow them.

That day our dinner was less gloomy than usual. My father conversed with Mario as he had not done for a long time, and the latter, with satisfaction, attributed to himself this change (which, to do him justice, had been the object of persevering effort). But Livia, who had more penetration, saw there was some other reason; for

she speedily observed that this change was especially evident towards me. In fact, for the first time since the fatal day that seemed like a dividing line in my young life, I once more saw in my father's eyes the fond look I was formerly accustomed to; and this paternal and almost forgotten expression gave me new life and a sensation of joy and happiness that made me raise my head as a flower beaten down by the storm looks up at the first return of the sun.

The explanation was not long delayed. The next day my father sent for me at an earlier hour than I generally went to him, and after a preamble which I scarcely comprehended, and which by no means served to prepare me for what I was about to hear, he informed me that the Duca di Valenzano had asked for my hand. I remained stupefied with astonishment, and my father continued: "It was impossible to expect a proposal like this for one of my daughters; but however brilliant it may be, I should unhesitatingly decline it were not the duke personally worthy of love and esteem. As to this I am satisfied from all I hear respecting him. But it is for you to decide about accepting his hand. I will not impose my will on you. Consider the subject, Ginevra. The Duca di Valenzano will come this evening to receive your reply."

My father might have said much more without my thinking of interrupting him. I was in such a state of utter amazement that I could hardly realize what he said, and the perspective thus suddenly opened before me conveyed no definite idea to my mind. It was easier to believe he was jesting with me than to suppose such a

man as the duke would propose for me to become his wife! . . .

I returned to my chamber extremely agitated, and this feeling was not diminished by witnessing my sister's emotion and Ottavia's noisy demonstrations of joy when I told them of the proposal that had just been communicated to me. The Duca di Valenzano was not only a person of high rank, but he was thought to possess every accomplishment, and it was evident that every one looked upon my consent as a matter of course.

Un homme accompli! Before going any further, I cannot help stopping to remark here to what a degree the world, generally so severe, shows itself indulgent in certain cases; and how often this indulgence is shared even by those who try to think they are not influenced by external circumstances! Assuredly neither my father, nor my sister, nor the simple Ottavia attributed the favorable impression produced on their minds to the brilliant position of this unexpected suitor, or the special merit he had acquired in their eyes, to the mere fact of his having thought of sharing his lot with me.

It would have been difficult for me to express my own feelings, for I hardly understood their nature. I was flattered; I was touched; I was even very grateful, for it was evident that the duke had begun by pleading my cause with my father, and hitherto he had been by no means unpleasing to me. Why, then, could I not think of him now without a kind of repugnance, fear, and aversion? And why did I feel as if I should prefer never to see him again? I asked myself these questions, at first silently, and then aloud, as was often my habit when with Livia and Ottavia,

who, though so different from each other, were nevertheless so alike in their affection for me.

"That is quite natural, *carina*," replied Livia. "You scarcely know the Duca di Valenzano, and the very word *marriage* is one of serious import, and even fearful, when it falls for the first time on the ears of a young girl. But this will pass away."

"Do you think so?"

"Oh! yes. I am sure of it. When you know him better, and especially when he, in his turn, comprehends the qualities of your mind, and heart, and soul, he will conceive such an affection for my dear Ginevra that she will soon love him in return, and not a little, I imagine."

"I think so, too," said Ottavia, laughing. "They say he is very captivating, to say nothing of his being one of the greatest and wealthiest noblemen of Italy. Ah! ah! what a different tone those wicked people will assume who say . . ."

Livia looked at Ottavia, who stopped short.

"Livia! do not stop her," I exclaimed. "Go on, Ottavia; I insist upon it. I wish to know what wicked people you refer to, and what they say."

Ottavia once more regretted her precipitation, and would rather have remained silent; but I continued to question her till she acknowledged some people had taken the liberty of saying I should never marry on account of "what had taken place."

"What a vague, cruel way of speaking!" exclaimed Livia indignantly. "Everybody knows now there was nothing, absolutely nothing at all, in that gossip; that it was all a mere falsehood."

"Everybody?" . . . I said with

sudden emotion. "But has not my father continued to treat me as if I were culpable?" Then after a moment's silence, I added: "Do you think these falsehoods have come to the ears of the Duca di Valenzano?"

"How can I tell?" replied Livia. "And of what consequence is it? His proposal shows that he is sure, as well as we, that you have nothing at all to reproach yourself for."

I made no reply. A new thought struck me, and I felt the necessity of being alone, in order to reflect on what had been suggested by her words. I therefore left my two

companions abruptly, and took a seat at the end of the terrace on a little parapet that looked on the sea, and there I remained nearly an hour.

That night, when the Duca di Valenzano returned, my father, at my solicitation, told him that, before coming to any decision, I wished to have some private conversation with him. It was not without difficulty I induced my father to convey this message; but the duke immediately assented, and with so much eagerness that it might have been supposed my request had only anticipated a wish of his own.

VIII.

I was in my usual place in the gallery, and alone, when the duke entered at the appointed hour. I rose, and extended my hand. He was astonished, I think, to find me so calm, and perhaps so grave, and looked at me a moment in silence, as if he would divine what I was going to say to him. Seeing that I remained silent, he at length said:

"Donna Ginevra, I thought myself skilled in reading the expression of your eyes; but in looking at you now, I cannot tell whether the word that is about to fall from your lips is yes or no."

I found it difficult to reply; but overcoming my embarrassment at last, I succeeded in saying:

"Yes or no? . . . If I only had that to say, M. le Duc, I could have charged my father with it. . . . But before speaking of the reply I am to make, I must make one request. You must tell me sincerely what you think of me, and I will afterwards tell you with the utmost frankness wherein you are mistaken."

He looked at me with an attentive air, and then smiled, as he said:

"Tell you what I think of you? . . . That might lead me to say more than I have yet the right to say. But I will tell you, Donna Ginevra, what I do not think, and, in so doing, I shall, I imagine, comply with your request. Let me fully assure you I attach no importance whatever to the words of a coxcomb; and I would call any one a liar, and treat him as such, who would dare to repeat them! . . ."

He saw, by the expression of joy that flashed from my eyes, that he had guessed aright.

"Poor child! . . . poor angel!" he continued, "it would be strange indeed if I took any other attitude than this before you." And he was about to kneel at my feet, when I eagerly prevented him.

"Do not do that, I beg of you!" I exclaimed. "And say, if you like, that I am a child, but do not call me an angel. . . . Oh! no, never say anything so far from the truth! Listen to me, for I re-

quested this interview only that you might know all—what is true as well as what is false."

"What is true?" he said in a slight tone of surprise.

"Yes. Listen to me. I thank you for not having believed what . . . what was said concerning me, for that, indeed, was false. I am, however, culpable, and it is right you should know it. Perhaps you will then change your mind, and think no more about me."

He looked at me again, as if he would read the depths of my soul.

"Is it with this design," he said "that you speak so frankly?"

I knew not what reply to make, for I no longer knew what I wished. I found a charm in the mingled tenderness and respect of which I so suddenly felt myself the object. Besides, I had suffered greatly from my long seclusion, and my heart involuntarily turned towards him who was trying to deliver me from it. . . . My fear and repugnance vanished beneath his sympathetic look.

"No," I said at last, "it is not for that reason."

"Then speak frankly," he said, "and let me hear this important revelation, whatever it may be."

"And will you promise solemnly never to reveal my secret?"

"Yes, I solemnly promise."

In spite of the solemnity of his words, I saw it was with difficulty he repressed a smile. But when he saw the agitation produced by the recollections thus awakened, his expression became serious. For a moment a cloud came over his face; but in proportion as I entered into the details of that last night of my mother's life—my thoughtlessness, my shock, and, finally, my despair and repentance—he became affected, and listened with so much

emotion that his look inspired me with confidence, and I finished without fear the account I had begun with a trembling voice.

As has been seen, I thought myself more guilty than I should have been had there been any truth in the vague, unmerited reproaches I had endured; for the slight fault I had really committed seemed indissolubly connected with the fearful calamity that followed! . . . That was why I thought myself unpardonable, and why I preferred to endure the most unfounded suspicions concerning me rather than reveal the truth to any one in the world—above all, to my father. But it seemed to me I ought not, for the same reason, to conceal it from him who had so generously offered me his hand, whatever might be the result. I therefore continued, and he listened without interrupting me. When I had ended, he spoke in his turn, and what he said decided the fate of my life.

I already felt relieved by the complete revelation of a secret I had hitherto kept with an obstinacy that was perhaps a little childish. And in listening to the soft accents of his sonorous, penetrating voice, my heart was more and more comforted, and soon allowed itself to be persuaded into what it was sweet and consoling to believe—that, as he said, I exaggerated the consequence of my thoughtlessness; that if I had afflicted my mother, I had time to ask and obtain her forgiveness; that I was ignorant of her dangerous condition, and, when I became aware of it, I supposed I had been the cause; . . . but all this was unreasonable. . . . And as to the flower . . . Here he stopped, and his brow darkened for a moment. "An-

sver me frankly," he said slowly; "if Flavio Aldini were still alive, if he were here under this window to-day, and implored you to give him that little sprig of jasmine I see in your belt . . ."

He had not time to finish.

"Is it possible," I exclaimed, "that you, who say you understand me, who pretend to have read my heart, can mention a name that has become so odious to me? . . ."

Then I continued, I imagine to his great surprise:

"You are the first to whom I have acknowledged the fault he made me commit, for I do not consider the ear of the priest to whom I confessed it as that of man. There I experienced the indulgence of heaven, and was forgiven by God as well as my mother. . . . But would you know what cost me the most that day? Not, certainly, my sorrow for the past; not my firm resolutions as to the future; nor even the humble acceptance of all the humiliations that have been inflicted on me. . . . No, what cost me the most was to promise to overcome my resentment, to subdue the bitterness awakened by the very name of Flavio, and to utter it every day in prayer for the repose of his soul! . . ."

I was, in speaking thus, very remote from the regions familiar to Lorenzo. While I was uttering these words, my face was lit up with an expression very different from any he had ever seen there. He gazed at me without seeming to hear what I said, and at length replied with evident emotion:

"I thank you for telling me this, though one look at you is sufficient to efface all doubt, as darkness vanishes before the approach of day."

After a moment's silence, he resumed: "And now, Ginevra, I implore you to delay no longer the reply I have come to receive."

The recollections of the past had made me forget for a few moments the present; but these words recalled it, and I looked at him as if confounded. There was a moment's silence. My heart beat loudly. At length I silently took from my belt the little sprig of jasmine he had just spoken of, and gave it to him.

He understood the reply, and his eyes lit up with gratitude and joy. I felt happier than I had anticipated. Was not this, in fact, what I had dreamed of, what I had longed for—to be loved? And would it not be easy to love in return such a man as this?

As these thoughts were crossing my mind, and I lowered my eyes before his, he suddenly said:

"Do you know how beautiful you are, Ginevra?"

At these words I frowned, and a blush rose to my forehead which once might have been caused by gratified vanity, but now was only occasioned by sincere, heart-felt displeasure. "Never speak to me of my face, I beg of you," I said to him, "unless you wish to annoy or displease me."

He looked at me with the greatest astonishment, though he felt no doubt as to my perfect sincerity, and, taking my hand in his, said:

"You are a being apart, Ginevra, and resemble no one else in any respect. It will be difficult sometimes to obey your request, but I will do so."

Had I been able to read Lorenzo's heart, I should, in my turn, have been astonished, and perhaps frightened, at the motives that had

induced him to link so suddenly his life with mine.

The beauty of which I was no longer vain; the talents I possessed without being aware of it; the strangeness of finding me in a kind of captivity, and the somewhat romantic satisfaction of delivering me from it and changing my condition by a stroke of a wand—such were the elements of the attraction to which he yielded; and if it had occurred to any one to remind him that the girl who was about to become his wife had a soul, he would very probably have replied by a glance of surprise, a sarcastic smile, or a slight shrug of his shoulders, as if to say: "Perhaps so, but it does not concern me."

It happened in this case, as often happens in many other circumstances, that a word, a look, or the tone of a voice impresses, persuades, and influences, and yet (perhaps for the happiness of the human race) does not reveal the inner secrets of the soul.

My engagement was announced the next day, and the last of May appointed for the marriage. There was a month before the time—a month the remembrance of which still stands out in my life like a season of enchantment. The restored confidence of my father, joined to the thought of our approaching separation, had revived all the fondness of his former affection. Lorenzo had succeeded in making him regret the excess of his severity towards me. Indebted to him, therefore, for the return of my father's love as well as the gift of his own, he seemed like some benevolent *genie* who had dispersed every cloud, and restored to my youth the warm, golden light of the sun. I thanked him for this without any circumlocution, and sometimes in

so warm a manner that he must have been the most unpresuming of men to suppose me indifferent to the sentiments he so often expressed, though not so ardently as to disturb me. He respected the request I made the first day. He suffered me to remain the child I still was, in spite of having experienced such varied emotions. Perhaps the strong contrast he thus found in me formed a study not devoid of interest to a man *blast* by all he had seen and encountered in the world.

The preparations for so brilliant a marriage completely filled up the time of the busy Ottavia, who was charged by my father to omit nothing in the way of dress requisite for the *fiancée* of the Duca di Valenzano. Mario, prouder than he was willing to acknowledge of an alliance that reflected lustre on the whole family, showed himself friendly and satisfied. Besides, the transformation that had taken place in my whole appearance within a few months, as well as in my way of life, had softened his manner towards me; and the more because he attributed the merit of it to himself, and often repeated that, had it not been for him, my father would not have had the courage to persevere in a severity that had had so salutary a result. He loved me, however, as I have had occasion in the course of my life to know; but as there are people in the world who are kind, and yet are not sympathetic, so there are also many who on certain occasions manifest some feeling, and yet are not kind. Mario was of the latter class. At certain times, on great occasions, he seemed to have a heart capable of affection and devotedness; but, as a general thing, it was rather evil than good he discovered in

everything and everybody, without excepting even those with whom he was most intimately connected, and perhaps in them *above all*.

Livia alone, after the first few days, seemed to have a shade of thoughtfulness and anxiety mingled with her joy, and Mario, who observed it, unhesitatingly declared it was caused by the prospect of remaining an old maid, doubly vexatious now her younger sister was about to ascend before her very eyes to the pinnacle of rank and fortune. But I knew Livia better than he, and, though unable to read all that was passing in her soul at that time, I was sure that no comparison of that kind, or any dissatisfied consideration of herself, had ever crossed her mind.

But I did not suspect that her pure, transparent nature, as well as the instinct of clear-sighted affection, enabled her to see some threatening signs in the heavens above me that seemed to every one else so brilliant with its sun and cloudless azure. But the die was cast, and it would have been useless to warn as well as dangerous to disturb me. She therefore confined herself to reminding me of all my mother's pious counsels. She made me promise never to forget them, and she, too, promised to pray for me. But when I told her she must continue to aid me with her advice, and remain true to her rôle of my guardian angel, she shook her head, and remained silent.

One day, when I spoke in this way, she replied: "Do not be under any illusion, Ginevra. Marriage is like death. One may prepare for it, one may be aided by the counsels, the prayers, and the encouragement of friends till the last moment; but once the line is

crossed, as the soul after death finds itself alone in the presence of its God, its heavenly bridegroom, to be eternally blessed by his love or cursed by its privation, so the wife finds herself alone in the world with her husband. There is no happiness for her but in their mutual affection. If this exists, she possesses the greatest happiness this world can afford. If deprived of it, she lacks everything. The world will be only a void, and she may still consider herself fortunate, if this void is filled by sorrow, and not by sin!"

"What you say is frightful."

"Yes, it is frightful; therefore I have never been able to covet so terrible a bondage. O my dear Gina! may God watch over you. . . ."

"You terrify me, Livia. I assure you I should never have regarded marriage under so serious an aspect, from the way in which people around us enter into it."

Livia blushed, and her eyes, generally so soft, assumed an expression of thoughtfulness and severity.

"I am nearly twenty-six years old," she said, "and am therefore no longer a girl, as you still are. But in a few days you will assume the duties of womanhood. You will place your hand in Lorenzo's, and pronounce the most fearful vow there is in the world. Let me therefore say one thing to you, which I am sure is the faithful echo of your mother's sentiments, and what she would certainly tell you likewise. Ginevra, rather than imitate any of those to whom you refer, rather than seek away from your own fireside a happiness similar to theirs, it would be better for God to call you to himself this very hour. Yes," she continued with unwonted energy, "sooner than

behold this, I would rather—I who love you so much—I would far rather see those beautiful eyes, now looking at me with so much surprise, close this very instant never to open again!"

I was, indeed, surprised. For

were not these words, or at least the idea they conveyed, what I had found written in the little book Livia had never read, and was it not my mother herself who actually spoke to me now through the voice of my sister? . . .

IX.

This conversation left a profound and painful impression on me, but it was counteracted by the increasing attachment Lorenzo inspired. During this phase of my life I only perceived his charming, noble qualities, the unusual variety of his tastes, his mental endowments, and, above all, his love for me, which it seemed impossible to return too fully. It would have required a degree of penetration not to be expected of one of my age to lift the brilliant veil and look beyond. Therefore the natural liveliness of my disposition, which had been prematurely extinguished by successive trials of too great a severity, gradually revived. It was no unusual thing now to hear me laugh and sing as I used to. The influence of this new cheerful life counteracted the effects of the factitious life I had led the previous year. Under Lorenzo's protection, and escorted by Mario, I was allowed to take long rides on horseback, which restored freshness to my cheeks, and inspired that youthful feeling which may be called the pleasure of living —a feeling that till now I had been a stranger to. My mind was developed by intercourse with one so superior to myself, and who endeavored to interest and instruct me. In a word, my whole nature developed and expanded in every way, and for awhile I believed in the realization here below of perfectly unclouded happiness.

A sad accident, however, occurred, which cast a shadow over the brief duration of those delightful days. It was now the last day but one before our marriage, and for the last time we were to make an excursion on horseback, which was also to be an adieu to the mountains, the sea, and the beautiful shore that had been familiar to me from my infancy. For, immediately after, we were to leave Messina; and though it was to go to Naples, I thought more of what I was about to leave than what I was to find, and the melancholy of approaching separation seemed diffused over all nature around me. Our horses were waiting at a gate at the end of the garden, which, on that side, opened into the country. Mario and Lorenzo had gone before, and I was walking slowly along to join them, holding my skirt up with one hand, and leaning with the other on Livia, who was going to see our cavalcade set off.

Mario had already mounted his horse, but Lorenzo, on foot beside Prima, my pretty pony, was waiting to help me mount. He held out his hand. I placed my foot on it, and sprang gaily up. As soon as I was seated, he stepped back to mount his own horse, while Livia remained beside me to arrange the folds of my long habit. Just then the wind blew off her light straw hat, to which was attached a long, blue veil, and both passing suddenly

across my horse's eyes before I had fairly gathered up the bridle, he took fright. I was unable to check him. He sprang madly away, bearing me along the narrow alley leading from the garden to the highway. I heard the screams of those who remained motionless behind, but nothing afterwards except a hum in my ears. A flash seemed to pass before my eyes, but I retained my consciousness. I realized that I was lost. The alley, like that in the garden, was bordered with a thick hedge of box extending to the road, which was here at an immense height along a cliff overlooking the sea and protected by a low parapet. My ungovernable horse was evidently about to leap over it and precipitate me below. . . . I recommended myself to God, dropped the bridle, gathered up the folds of my habit with both hands, and, murmuring the words, *Madonna santa, aiutate mi!** I allowed myself to fall on the hedge which bordered the alley. I might have been killed in this way no less surely than the other; but I escaped. The thick, elastic box yielded to my weight without breaking, which prevented me from receiving any harm from the fall. I remained stunned and motionless, but did not lose my senses. I know not how many seconds elapsed before I heard Lorenzo's voice. I opened my eyes, and smiled as I met his gaze. I shall never forget the passionate expression of love and joy that flashed from his pale, terrified face, which was bending over me! He raised me from the verdant couch where I lay, and pressed me in his arms with mute transport. I, too, was happy. I felt an infinite joy that I had been saved

and was still alive. I leaned my head against his shoulder, and closed my eyes. My hat had been thrown off, and my hair, completely loosened, fell almost to the ground. In this way he carried me back amid cries of joy from those who had followed us. Nothing was heard but exclamations of thanksgiving to God and the Virgin when, escorted by a crowd swelled by all on the road or in the neighboring fields, who had perceived the accident, we arrived at the principal entrance to the house. There they made me sit down, and in a few moments I was sufficiently restored to realize completely all that had happened.

Lorenzo continued to support me, and poured forth his joy in tender, incoherent words. My father embraced me. Ottavia wept, as she kissed my hands. Mario himself was affected. In the first moment of confusion I did not notice that my sister alone was wanting. But this absence soon struck me, and I eagerly asked for her, calling her by name as I looked around me. There was a moment's hesitation, and I saw two of the servants near me making the odious sign of which I have already explained the signification. And—must it be said?—Lorenzo's hand that held mine contracted also, and I saw that he, likewise, was so absurd as to wish to protect me in this way. I rose. . . . I no longer felt the effects of the fall I had just had. I pushed them all aside, and him the first. The circle around me opened, and I saw my sister, pale and motionless, leaning against one of the pillars of the vestibule! I forgot everything that had occurred. I thought of nothing but her, and threw myself on her neck.

"Do not be alarmed, my de-

* Holy Madonna, assist me.

Livia," I said loud enough for every one to hear. "I assure you I have received no injury. I thought you were more courageous. It does not seem like you to be so frightened. The Madonna, you see, has protected me. I know you said a fervent *Ave Maria* for me when you saw me so swiftly carried away, and your prayer was heard. . . ."

Livia pressed me in her arms without speaking, and tears began to flow from her eyes. Leaning on her arm, and refusing assistance from any one else, I started to go to my chamber. But just as I was leaving the porch a thought occurred.

"And my poor Prima," I said. "What has become of her?"

The reply to this question made me shudder. The poor animal had sprung over the parapet, and fallen down the precipice into the sea! . . . Our delightful excursions had ended in a sinister manner, and more than one painful feeling mingled with my joy at having escaped so great a peril. My heart felt heavy and oppressed, and my first act on entering my chamber with Livia was to fall on my knees before a statue of the Madonna, which, in honor of the month of May, was brilliant with lights and flowers. . . . Livia knelt beside me, but her prayer was longer than mine, and I saw that she continued to weep as she prayed.

"Come, Livia," I said to her at last, not wishing her to suppose I thought her sadness could have any other cause than my accident, "your distress concerning me is unreasonable. You weep as if I had been carried by my poor Prima to the bottom of the sea, instead of being here alive with you."

Livia rose, wiped her eyes, and smiled.

"You are right, Gina," she said in a calm tone. "I ought to profit by the few moments we have together, for we shall not be left alone long. I have something to tell you, dear child—something that will surprise you, perhaps—not about you, but myself."

I looked up in astonishment.

"Let me first put up your long, thick hair, and take off your habit, so soiled and torn. Then you shall sit quietly down there, and I will tell you what I have to say."

I allowed her to do as she wished, and obeyed her without reply or question. She appeared thoughtful and agitated, and I saw there was something extraordinary on her mind.

When I had, according to her injunction, taken the only arm-chair there was in my chamber, Livia seated herself on a stool near me.

"Listen to me, Gina," she said. "It will not take long for what I have to say. Do not interrupt me. You are really here before me," continued she, passing her hand over my hair in a caressing manner, and looking at me affectionately. "God has protected you, and I bless him a thousand times for it. But say if, instead of this, the horror of seeing you disappear for ever had been reserved for me an hour ago—me who love you more than my own life—do you know to what the witnesses of this catastrophe would have attributed it? Do you know what, perhaps, they think now? . . ."

I blushed in spite of myself, but made a negative sign, as if I did not comprehend her.

"You shake your head, but you know very well what Lorenzo and Mario would have thought, and who knows but my father himself,

and everybody else? . . . Was I not beside you this time also? Did I not bring you ill-luck? . . . Did not every one around you just now have this idea in their minds, and were they not ready to exclaim, ‘*Jettatrice*’—‘*Jettatrice*,’” repeated she in a stifled voice—“a name harder to bear than an injury, more difficult to defy than calumny, it is really on her to whom it is applied, and not those she approaches, this fatal influence falls!”

“Livia!” I exclaimed, turning red once more, but trying to laugh, “is it really you, my pious, reasonable sister, who uses such language? The folly to which you allude has more than once vexed me to tears, and I must confess I cannot now bear that you should seriously speak to me in such a way.”

Livia smiled, as she embraced me, and I saw it pleased her to hear me reply in this manner. But she soon resumed more gravely:

“You know very well, Ginevra, what I think of this myself. Therefore for a long time I despised this folly, and endeavored to overcome the cruel impression it left upon me; for,” continued she, her voice trembling with emotion in spite of herself, “it is a peculiarly hard trial, you may suppose, to feel your heart full of tenderness, sympathy, and pity for others, and yet seemingly to bring them danger and misfortune. . . . For instance, to extend your arms to a child and see its mother hesitate to allow you to take it, or even to look at it. But let us change the subject. I have never alluded to this trial, and, if I speak of it now, it is not to excite your sympathy, but, on the contrary, to tell you I am no longer to be pitied. The hour that has just passed was horrible, it

is true, but it put an end to my hesitation and doubt. I see my way clearly now, and peace has returned to my soul.”

Her eyes, though still full of tears, wore an expression of celestial joy. I looked at her with astonishment, but did not try to interrupt her. She continued:

“Gina, my darling sister, you have found your sphere, and I have found mine. May God grant you all the happiness, yes, all the joy, to be found in this world! But it will not equal mine. Pity me no longer, I repeat. It is to me he has given the better part.”

Her voice, her accent, and her looks expressed more than her words. I understood her, and was seized with strange emotion. Yes, very strange! and a feeling very different from what might have been supposed.

I loved Livia, and my approaching separation from her filled me with so much sorrow as to dim my happiness. Now I felt that a barrier even more insurmountable than distance was to come between us. It was not, however, affliction on my part, or pity for her, that I experienced. It was—shall I say it?—an inexplicable feeling of respect and envy—a vague, unreasonable wish to follow her; a mysterious aspiration for something higher, nobler, and more perfect than wealth, position, rank, and the *éclat* so soon to surround me, and more precious than the love itself that had fallen to my lot!

I remained a long time incapable of making my sister any reply, my eyes, like hers, fastened on the far-off horizon, now tinged with the softest evening hues.

O my God! a ray of the same light fell on us both at that moment; but for her it was the pure, calm

light of the dawn; for me it was like a flash of lightning which gives one glimpse of the shore, but does

not diminish the darkness of the coming night or the danger of the threatening storm

X.

LIVIA was the first to return to herself and put an end to my singular and ill-timed reverie.

"I hope, however, you do not imagine my resolution is to be attributed to the *jetatura*," she said.

These words immediately recalled me to a sense of all that had taken place the previous hour. I reflected an instant, and then replied:

"No; I know too well what you yourself would think of a vocation that had such an origin."

"And yet I cannot deny," she said, "that it has had a certain influence on my destiny; for, thanks to the *jetatura*, I have had a heavy, mysterious cross to bear. It is not to get rid of this cross I wish to leave the world, but to embrace it more closely and experience more fully the blessings it has revealed to me."

"That is above my comprehension, Livia. I no longer understand you."

"You know very well, however, do you not, that love is the chief element of happiness?" said she slowly.

"Yes, I believe that. Happiness consists chiefly in loving and being loved, I imagine. Everything else is merely accessory."

"And you know what is accessory loses all importance when the whole heart and soul are absorbed in some adored and adorable being?"

"Yes; . . . but the difficulty is

to love thus though I say this hesitatingly, lest it seem ungrateful to Lorenzo."

"You are right, Ginevra. It is very difficult, and even impossible, in this world, as you will some day realize more fully than you do now."

We were both silent for a few moments.

"And my father," I at last resumed—"what will my poor father say to this separation?"

"What would he say, I beg to know, if a noble, wealthy man—in fact, a great lord like Lorenzo—should ask my hand on condition of carrying me away, like you, beyond the mountains and the sea? Do you think he would refuse? Well, neither will he refuse Him who demands my heart and life. For, after all, is not he alone great—the only Lord? . . . But of course my father will decide the matter. It will be when and as he wishes."

This conversation gave me a glimpse of a world into which the hour had not yet come for me to penetrate, and I was diverted from the thoughts it awakened in my soul by the excitement and agitation that followed. But every word of this last conversation remained fixed in my memory; whereas the incidents and impressions of the following day only seem like a dream—yes, like a dream when I recall the confusion of that last day, the preparations both for my

wedding and my journey (for I was to leave my father's house and my native land nearly at the same time), Ottavia's feverish excitement, and the quiet activity of Livia, who thought of everything, and arranged everything calmly and in order. Then there was a succession of calls from our young friends and relatives, who, according to the custom in our country, could not be present at the wedding, and therefore came to take leave of me on the eve, and admire at their leisure the rich presents of the bridegroom, especially the jewels, which were unusually splendid. Among these young girls I particularly remember my two cousins, Mariuccia and Teresina, who, as well as their mother, Donna Clelia, experienced many conflicting emotions on the occasion of their young cousin's brilliant marriage. But interest and curiosity finally overcame the grain of ill-humor which my aunt especially could not help feeling at seeing me attain a rank and position which her most ambitious flights could not hope for her daughters to obtain. Donna Clelia was my father's sister, but she did not resemble him in the least. She was married to a wealthy man of an obscure family, and, as she was remarkable for nothing but her ability as a manager and her kind heart, she had passed her life in a different sphere from that my father had attained by his talents and celebrity. This sometimes caused a temporary feeling of spite, but she was in the main an excellent woman and a good mother.

At length the great day came and nearly passed away; for it was not till night came on—that is, about nine o'clock in the evening—that the ceremony took place. The large *salon* was illuminated

with all the lights in the crystal chandelier, and at the farther end of the room an altar had been placed, adorned with lights and flowers. Before it stood good old Don Placido, awaiting those he was to unite. His long, white beard and Capuchin habit formed a singular contrast to the elegant toiletts around him and the total lack of any religious aspect—as was proper at a wedding in the midst of a brilliant assembly like this, and in a place better fitted for worldly gayety than the celebration of a holy rite.

Don Fabrizio soon appeared, leading the pale, trembling bride clothed in white, and wearing on her forehead a coronet of diamonds whose *fleurons* indicated her new rank. Every eye was fastened on her, as she knelt beside the bridegroom at the feet of the venerable old priest who had baptized her, and was now waiting to bless her marriage. I only remember that the very moment when Don Placido was joining our hands Livia's words occurred to my mind: "You are going to pronounce the most fearful vow there is in the world," and my voice failed me. Lorenzo, on the contrary, spoke unhesitatingly and with perfect distinctness. Don Placido then addressed us a few words that affected me to tears, for he spoke of her who was not here to accompany her child to the altar; and this sorrowful recollection, alluded to in language so touching, made me forget everything else, and for a few moments entirely absorbed me. I cannot recollect anything more till, leaning on Lorenzo's arm, I descended the grand staircase, in order to go to the palace he owned at a short distance, and where he had lately resided. The night was glorious, the air soft and balmy, and I took a seat

in the open carriage with nothing around me but my lace veil. My bridal dress was becoming, notwithstanding my paleness, and the diamonds I was covered with sparkled in the light of the torches borne by the attendants. A murmur of admiration ran through the crowd at my appearance; and when Lorenzo took a seat at my side, the air resounded with cheers and enthusiastic exclamations. We at last set off amid cries of "*Evviva i sposi!*" "*Evviva il duca!*" "*Evviva la duchessa!*"* . . . We set off, but not alone. According to our custom, we were preceded, accompanied, and followed by a crowd of relatives and friends who thronged the house which I now entered for the first time. I was obliged to receive them all, listen to them, reply, and, above all, do the honors of a place more familiar to every one there than to myself!

This old palace had been very magnificent once, but it was now in the dilapidated condition into which all buildings for a long time uninhabited generally fall. On this occasion the walls were covered with rich hangings, and on every side there was a profusion of lights and flowers. It was brilliantly illuminated without, and through the open windows of the *salon* came the sound of ravishing music in the garden. For this evening, at least, they had succeeded in giving to this ancient habitation not only a sumptuous and cheerful aspect, but one really fairy-like.

It will not seem surprising that, agitated and excited as I had been, the brilliancy of such a *soirée* was repugnant to my feelings. It may

* "Long live the spouses! Long live the duke!
Long live the duchess!"

not even seem astonishing that, in spite of all that was apparently combined to intoxicate me with joy and pride, a scene so brilliant, so little in accordance with the solemn emotions of the day, should have produced an entirely opposite effect on me. The transition had been too sudden and abrupt. This was the first time but once I had ever been in the gay world, and the recollections associated with that occasion were the most terrible of my life, as well as the most deeply graven on my memory. It is not strange, therefore, that I felt a painful depression of spirits, as well as a fearful embarrassment and an irresistible desire to escape from them all—even from Lorenzo himself, whose radiant look seemed so unable to comprehend my feelings that I could not turn to him for the sympathy that had heretofore inspired me with so much confidence in him. I looked around in vain for a glimpse of my compassionate sister; but she had been made no exception to the custom forbidding young girls to be present at nuptial festivals. My father, after escorting me to the door of my new home, had returned, not being able to overcome his repugnance to mingle in the world. Mario that evening was cold and sarcastic. I felt, therefore, alone and frightened, and quite overcome by emotion and fatigue. In addition to this, I had a severe headache from the weight of the coronet I wore, and, feeling nearly ready to faint, I went to one of the balconies, when, perceiving some steps leading to a vast *loggia*, I hastily descended, and almost ran to seat myself on a stone bench at the end of the terrace which overlooked a part of the garden more retired and ob-

secure than the rest. There I felt I could breathe freely. Away from the crowd and the dazzling lights, the sound of the music faintly heard at a distance, and looking up with delight through the foliage at the tranquil heavens brilliant with stars, I took off the rich diadem that burdened my head, and felt relieved as the evening wind blew back my hair and cooled my brow. I leaned my head against my clasped hands, and did what had hitherto seemed impossible—I collected my thoughts a moment: I reflected and prayed.

I was married. My past life was at an end. A new and untried life had begun. What had it in reserve for me? What lay in the future, seemingly so brilliant, but in reality so dark? I could not tell, and at this moment I felt a vague terror rather than joyful anticipations. For the second time that evening Livia's voice seemed to resound in my ears, and this time to echo the words my mother had written. I seemed to make them some promise I hardly comprehended myself, and I murmured the words: "Rather die! . . ."

Lorenzo's voice recalled me to myself. His eyes, which had never lost sight of me, immediately perceived my absence, and he was now at my side. He was alarmed at first at the sight of my tears, my disordered hair, and the coronet lying on the stone bench beside me, but was reassured when I looked up with an appealing expression, and understood me without giving me the trouble to speak.

"Poor Ginevra!" he softly said in a caressing tone of protection which he so well knew how to as-

sume. "Yes, you are right. This display is foolish, this crowd is odious, and has been too much for your strength. And how absurd," he continued, "to hide this golden hair, and burden so young and fair a brow with heavy jewels! You did not need them, my Ginevra. You were certainly charming with the coronet on, but much more so as you are. . . . Ah! do not shake your head. You must allow me to say what I please now. You no longer have the right to impose silence on me, and I am no longer bound to obey you. . . ."

So saying, he led me slowly back to the house, but, instead of returning to the rooms still crowded with company, he took me another way leading to a *boudoir* of a circular form, which was ornamented with particular care. The gilding, the mirrors, and the paintings did not seem to have suffered from the effects of time like the rest of the house. Nothing was wanting that could give this little room a comfortable and sumptuous aspect. The soft light of a lamp suspended from the ceiling was diffused throughout the room, and perfect silence reigned.

"This is your room, Ginevra," said Lorenzo, carelessly throwing on one of the tables the circlet of diamonds he held in his hands. "Here you can quietly repose undisturbed by the crowd. There is absolutely nothing to disturb you here; the music itself can scarcely be heard. I will leave you, my Ginevra, to explain your absence and endure till the end of the evening the fearful task it pleases them to impose on us, but from which, at least, they must allow me to deliver you."

XI.

The following day, as the breeze declined, I was standing beside Lorenzo on the deck of the ship that was bearing us away. I had left behind me all I had hitherto known and loved, and my eyes were yet tearful from my last farewells. I stood looking at the receding shores of Sicily, and the magnificent amphitheatre of Messina rising up before us, which presents so imposing an appearance when seen from the sea. We soon passed between the two famous whirlpools which often afford a comparison for those among us *voyageurs* over the sea of life who escape one only to fall into the other—a comparison figuratively very apt, though in reality it is quite doubtful if in our day any navigator ever falls either into Scylla or Charybdis.

When nothing more was to be seen, and night came on with its serene and starry heavens, revealing only the outline like a silvery vapor which marked the coast of Italy, I consented at last to leave the place where I had been standing motionless, and took a seat under an awning Lorenzo had put up for me on deck. During the hour of calm repose I enjoyed there—my first and almost only hour of perfect happiness!—I was inspired with renewed hope and confidence while listening to the penetrating accents of the husband whose idol I was, as he depicted the future in language whose magic charm seemed to open a whole life of pleasure before me. After a few days' rest at Naples, we were to take a delightful journey through Italy and France. We should behold all the places and objects I had so often seen in imagination, and whose names were so familiar

to my memory. The interest I was capable of feeling in every subject, the curiosity so natural to the young, and the undeveloped sense of the beautiful which Lorenzo knew so well how to draw out and gratify, the taste for art with which he was gifted—all these chords, as yet nearly untried, seemed to vibrate within me as I listened to him. I was like a docile instrument from which a skilful hand knows how to draw forth sounds hitherto unsuspected. As in certain compositions of the great masters, the same musical idea is persistently reproduced in the most varied modulations, so on all subjects and on all occasions he found means to lead my heart back to the certain conviction of being loved—loved as much as in my most ambitious dreams I had ever imagined it would be sweet to be loved. At that moment the vow so “fearful” seemed easy to keep; and if Livia's words had occurred to me then, they would doubtless have excited a smile! . . .

One false note, however, or at least a doubtful one, disturbed for an instant the harmony that seemed to reign between us.

Every one who has crossed, on a beautiful summer night, the sea that washes those enchanted shores, has doubtless experienced the undefinable impression of mingled delight and peace, enthusiasm and dreaminess, that sometimes comes over one while watching the stars becoming more intense in their brilliancy, and the luminous sea like a widespread mirror reflecting the immensity of the heavens. We grew silent, and after a time I rose and went to the side of the ship to contemplate more fully the beauty

of the night, and there, with uplifted face and clasped hands, one of those inarticulate prayers rose from my heart in which the happiness of the present moment is confounded with admiration for the wonders of the divine creation, and the soul truly feels itself greater than the entire universe, because it alone has the power to render thanks to Him who not only created it but the whole world.

Lorenzo had followed me, and taken a seat on the bench that ran along the side of the ship, where, with his head leaning on one hand, and his back to the sea, he sat intently gazing at me. Filled with devout thoughts, I took his hand, and, pressing it in mine, I said : "O my dear husband ! let us offer up one short prayer together—a prayer of thanksgiving to God. . . ." His only reply was to seize both of my hands, and kiss them one after the other, and then to laugh gently, as one would at the prattling of a child ! . . . A sudden sensation of pain darted through my heart like an arrow ; and if it had not been so dark, he might have seen how pale I at once turned. But he did not notice or suspect my emotion, though his eyes were fastened on my face. "*Beatrice in suso, ed io in lei guardava,*"* he said in his most caressing tone. Then he continued : "Your eyes are my heaven, Ginevra. I need not raise them any higher."

The sentiment to which I had appealed was one so utterly unknown to him that he unconsciously destroyed the emotion I felt.

"Ah ! Lorenzo," I exclaimed in my anguish, "Dante had a different meaning, or Beatrice would not have allowed him to use such lan-

guage." Then I stopped, obeying for the first time the instinctive feeling, so painful but right, that checks every word on a woman's lips which, as has been so well expressed, would be profaned if not understood.

But this was rather instinctive than the result of thought with me. And though the ray of truth that time was to reveal more fully was vivid, it was only transient, . . . and my momentary disappointment left no permanent impression at the time, though I did not forget it, and the recollection came back at a later day.

Coming from Sicily, the sight of the Bay of Naples does not, of course, inspire the same degree of wonder and admiration felt by those who come from the north ; but it was with a feeling of delight my eyes wandered around, after passing Capri, and beheld at the right the wonderful chain of mountains at whose foot lies the charming shore of Sorrento ; at the left Posillipo and all the pleasant villas that crown its height ; in front the marked outline of Vesuvius standing out against the majestic Apennines in the distance ; and, finally, Naples, smiling and lovely, seated on the inner shore of its beautiful bay ! Whatever may be said as to the possibility of finding anywhere else in the world a prospect as magnificent as this, and even if it is true that there is one, it would be impossible to remember it when the view I have just described is presented to the eye for the first time.

While we were thus rapidly crossing the bay, and I was gazing on every side with delight, Lorenzo pointed out the Villa Reale, beyond which stood the house we were to live in, surrounded by a

* "Beatrice upward gazed, and I on her."

large garden—a charming habitation which combined all the attractions of the country and all the advantages of the city, and which, when I entered it for the first time, seemed like a beautiful frame to the sunny picture of my future life.

On this occasion we only remained a fortnight at Naples; but this was sufficient to make me appreciate my new home, and the prospect of returning to it an additional pleasure in the journey before us. It is, in fact, only pleasant to travel around the world when we can see in imagination a place awaiting us where some day we are to find rest and deposit the treasures we have accumulated. . . . Happily for me, I was then far from foreseeing those I should have to bring back when I returned to this spot! . . .

The day after our arrival Lorenzo took me for the first time into his studio, where I was filled with astonishment at the exquisite perfection of the productions I found there. I had often heard him called a great artist, and I now realized it was no idle flattery. But I involuntarily turned my eyes away from many of them, and stood gazing with admiration at a statue which was incontestably the finest in the gallery. It represented a young girl whose flowing drapery was marvellous in execution and grace. Her face, though perfectly beautiful, had an expression of grief and terror. A lamp stood at her feet, but the light had gone out.

Lorenzo's pride as an artist had never been gratified with a more lively or more *naïve* admiration than mine.

"O Ginevra mia!" he exclaimed, "if I have hitherto been consid-

ered an artist, what shall I be when I have you for my model and my judge?"

He then told me that this beautiful statue represented a vestal, but it lacked a pendant which he had never been able to execute.

"But now," he added, "I am sure of succeeding. I have long sought a model for my second vestal, and at last I have found one."

He put my hair back with one hand, and, examining me attentively with a thoughtful air, continued, as if talking to himself: "Yes, . . . these faultless features, the noble, dignified air of the head, the profound expression of the eyes, and the gravity of the mouth, constitute the very type I want. I could not find a better combination of all I need for my noble, mysterious vestal—the vigilant, faithful guardian of the sacred fire. I will begin it to-morrow."

"Not here, will you?" said I, glancing uneasily at a Bacchante as unlike as possible to the statue I had been admiring, and which I could hardly believe came from the same hand. Lorenzo looked at me with astonishment, and hardly seemed to comprehend me. He only regarded such things from an artistic point of view—perhaps a valid excuse, but it was the second time within two days his uncommon penetration had been at fault. He was really skilful at reading a passing thought that had not been expressed, and in penetrating somewhat below the surface, but he was incapable of looking deeply into a soul, or of following it when it rose to certain heights. When I clearly made known my wishes, however, he immediately assented to them, and took me into an adjoining room that was smaller.

"Just as you please," he said. "You shall come here to sit to me, and I promise you, Ginevra, that there shall be nothing in this studio except what you are willing to look at."

XII.

During my first stay at Naples we made no visits, and our doors were closed against every one. It was our honeymoon. Lorenzo chose to pass it entirely alone with me, and I was far from wishing it otherwise. Every one respected our solitude. Nevertheless, as soon as my arrival was known, Lorenzo's friends and acquaintances, with the proverbial courtesy of Neapolitan society, sent me their cards as a sign of welcome. We looked them over together in the evening, and I thus learned the names of the acquaintances I should soon have to make. Lorenzo sometimes laughingly made comments on them which were more or less flattering and diffuse. One evening, however, he excited a feeling of surprise and uneasiness. I had, as usual, taken up the cards that had been left that day, when I saw him change color at the sight of one, which he snatched hastily from my hand, and tore into a thousand pieces. The extreme suddenness of the act checked the question I was on the point of asking. I remained silent, but the name I had read on the card was graven infamely on my memory in consequence of the occurrence. I shall never forget it. Lorenzo quickly recovered himself at seeing my surprise, and told me it was the card of a foreign lady who had left Naples, and whose call I never need trouble myself to return. Then taking up the next card, he read aloud :

"Stella d'Oria, Contessa di San Giulio." "Ah! as for her," he exclaimed, "you will like her, I

know, and I am willing you should become friends. I used to consider her a little too perfect to suit me, but I am of a different opinion when it is a question of my wife. . . ."

The new statue was begun without any delay. I sat to him two or three hours every day, and in the evening we took long walks on the heights of Camaldoli, where we were most sure of not meeting any one. He enjoyed my admiration for the wonderful aspect of nature around us, and took pleasure in giving me a fresh surprise every day. And he was not yet tired of entertaining me with the varied events of his past life, and of witnessing the interest his conversation invariably excited in one who possessed an intelligent but unstored mind. Complete harmony seemed to reign between us, and yet more than once during the brief duration of these happy days it was suddenly disturbed by some discordant note which caused the vague uneasiness I have already spoken of that seemed like one of those momentary shooting pains that are the premonitions of some fixed, incurable disease. In both cases they are experienced a long time before the cause is understood, and the disease is often far advanced before the tendency of these symptoms is clear and unmistakable.

The terrible chastisement that followed the gratification of my vanity on that one occasion had inspired me, as I have said, with a kind of repugnance, if not terror, to have my face praised. This repug-

nance on the part of a young girl who had reason to be proud of her beauty was an originality which had perhaps given me additional attraction in Lorenzo's eyes. Now I was his wife, I could not, of course, expect him to obey me and keep up the same reserve in our intercourse. And yet how many times, especially during those long sittings in the studio, I longed to impose silence on him! . . . How many times I felt a blush mount to my forehead when, after arranging my drapery and attitude, unbraiding and putting my long hair to suit his own fancy, and making me change my position a dozen times, he would fall into an ecstasy against which my whole soul revolted! Was this the passion full of mingled tenderness and respect that I should have been as proud to inspire as to experience? Was this really being loved as I had longed to be? I sometimes asked myself if his admiration for the hands, arms, face, and whole form of a statue was of a different nature. I did not yet go so far as to wonder if some other woman, merely endowed with greater beauty than I, could not easily rob me of a love that had so frail a foundation. . . .

Fortunately, we left Naples when the fortnight was at an end, though the statue was not half finished. Our long *tête-à-tête* had not proved to be all I had anticipated. I hoped more from the journey, and this hope was not disappointed. Lorenzo was capable of being the best and most intelligent of guides everywhere, and such he was during our rapid journey through Italy, where we only remained long enough in each city to admire the monuments and museums, though we did not follow the beaten track of ordinary tourists. Lorenzo thought himself versed in everything relating

to art and history, and yet he did not seem to realize that the church had also had its *rôle* in the history of his country. Therefore one side of Italian history escaped him entirely, and I do not know if, even at Rome, it had ever occurred to him there had been any change whatever of religion between the building of the Temple of Vesta and the time when the dome of Michael Angelo was raised in the air. Both are worthy of admiration in a different degree, and he regarded them with the same eye. But I did not then perceive all he left unexpressed. My thoughts and attention were absorbed by all there was around me to see. I was astonished to find myself in a world so fruitful in sources of interest that perhaps there is no one man on earth able to investigate them all equally. One alone, independent of the rest, might really suffice for the study of a whole life-time.

At length we arrived at Paris. Lorenzo, of course, had frequently made long visits there, and had a host of friends and acquaintances there as well as everywhere else. A few days after our arrival, I attended a large ball for the first time since my marriage, and the second in my life. I heard my name murmured on every side. I was surrounded with homage and overwhelmed with compliments. I was afterwards informed I had been the object of universal admiration; that nothing was talked of but the beauty of the Duchessa di Valenzano and her diamonds; and that a journal accustomed to give an account of the gayeties of the season had devoted a long paragraph to the description of my dress and person.

All this was reported to us by a young cousin of Lorenzo's whose

name, in reality, was Landolfo Landini, though his friends usually called him Lando Landi. He had lived in Paris several years, and considered himself almost a Frenchman. He had acquired the stamp of those people who have no aim in life—as easily imitated as they are unworthy of being so—and had wasted the natural cleverness and good-nature which redeemed some of his faults. He prided himself particularly on using the language of polite society, and was under the illusion that he completely disguised his nationality. When he fell in with a fellow-countryman, however, he allowed his natural disposition to reassert itself, and indulged in a flow of language that might have been amusing to some, but to me was frivolous and tiresome, and, after listening to the account of my grand success the previous evening with a coolness that seemed to astonish him, I fell into a reverie that had more than one cause. Why had Lorenzo watched me so attentively all the evening before? It was the first time we had appeared in society together, and he was anxious I should create a sensation. He himself had carefully selected the dress I was to wear, and I was pleased with the admiration with which he regarded me. On this point I had no hesitation: I was anxious to please *him*, but not to *please*; and as to the gay world into which he now introduced me, I entered it with the pleasure and curiosity of a child, and the lively interest inspired by everything that is new; but I had become strangely insensible to the pleasure of being admired, or even the gratification that springs from vanity.

In alluding once more to this fact, I will add that it was the effect of an exceptional grace; for at no

remote period of my youth had my mother detected the germ of this poisonous plant which was to shed so baleful an influence over the simplicity and uprightness of my nature.

This plant had been swept away in a single tempestuous night, and a divine hand had plucked out almost its last root. Was this peculiar grace (the forerunner of a much greater one I was to receive at a later day) granted me in answer to the prayer of my dying mother? Or was it to the sincere repentance that had so overwhelmed my soul? These things are among the mysteries of divine mercy beyond one's power to fathom. But it is certain I was thus preserved from one of the greatest dangers that await most ladies in the fashionable world. I was very far from being invulnerable on all points, as the future showed only too plainly; but I was on this.

Nevertheless, I had not been put to so decided a proof before. Never had I seen or imagined so brilliant a scene. I was delighted and charmed, and unhesitatingly gave myself up to the enjoyment of the evening; but the incense lavished on me added nothing to my pleasure. It only produced a certain timidity that lessened my ease and greatly diminished my enjoyment. I sincerely think if I had been less beautiful or more simply dressed—in a word, less admired—I should have been happier and much more at my ease.

In my embarrassment I was glad to find Lorenzo always near me, and the more so because I had no idea it was not absolutely the custom. But I noticed with some surprise that he observed every movement I made with a strange attention, and listened to every

word I uttered when addressed. Perhaps others did not perceive this, but I understood his quick, observant glance and the expressive features he knew so well how to control, and I knew also the art with which he could seem occupied with what was going on at one end of a room, while his whole attention was absorbed in what was said at the other. In short, I felt he had not lost sight of me a single instant the whole evening, and that not one of my words had escaped him. I wondered if his affection for me was the sole cause of this constantly-marked solicitude. This was the primary cause of my uneasiness. Another arose from the conversation that was actually going on in my presence, which I listened to with pain, and as a passive witness; for I could take no part in it.

How could Lorenzo take any pleasure in the trivial details, the unmeaning gossip, and the doubtful jests of Landolfo Landini? . . . How could he question him, reply to what he said, and encourage him to continue? And yet Lorenzo was a very different person from his cousin. He was very far from leading an aimless life. He had undertaken long, dangerous journeys that had entailed great exertion and incredible fatigue, in order to increase his extensive and varied knowledge. He was capable of continued application. Talents like his could only be acquired by profound study of a hundred different subjects, as well as by long, serious, persevering practice in the art in which he had become such a proficient. One can hardly conceive of frivolity in an artist, and yet this anomaly exists. I have since remarked it in others, as I observed it now in Lorenzo—a

proof, doubtless, that to soar above the every-day world, and keep at such heights, talent and genius, no more than the soul, should be separated from God!

The morning at length passed away, and about four o'clock we ordered the *calèche* for a long drive. The first hour was devoted to making numerous purchases. Lando Landi escorted us. Perfect familiarity with the shops of Paris was one of his specialties. Above all, he knew where to find those curiosities that are almost objects of art, and which have the gift, so precious to those who sell them, of inducing people who make the first purchase to continue indefinitely; for each new object of that class acquires additional value in the eyes of a connoisseur, and in such matters, more than any other, *l'appétit vient en mangeant.**

We remained more than an hour in the first shop we stopped at. Lorenzo was in his element. He was a genuine connoisseur in everything. He examined bronzes, porcelains, furniture of every epoch, carved wood from all countries, and old tapestry, with a sure and experienced eye, and the merchant, seeing whom he had to deal with, brought out of his secret recesses treasures hidden from the vulgar, and multiplied temptations. Lorenzo seemed very little inclined to resist. As for me, I took a seat beside the counter, and looked with indifference at the various objects that were spread out before me, but of which I was quite unable to perceive the value, which was somewhat conventional. I was a little astonished at the number and value of Lorenzo's purchases, but, on the whole, the business did not interest

* The appetite comes with eating.

me much, and I felt glad when it was at an end.

"Bravo! Lorenzo," said Lando as soon as we re-entered the carriage. "You don't do things half way. That is the way I like to see other people spend their money. It consoles me for not having any myself to throw out of the window."

"I have got to entirely refurnish my palace in Sicily," said Lorenzo, "as well as to decorate my house in Naples, which is quite unworthy of her who is to live in it."

"You are jesting, Lorenzo," said I. "You know very well I think nothing is lacking."

"That is the consequence of your extreme youth, my dear cousin," said Lando. "Wait a while, and you will find out how much becomes indispensable to one who has lived in Paris."

"At all events," said Lorenzo, "now or never is the time for me to gratify my fancy. I am just going to housekeeping. I have barely spent a third of my present fortune, and am perfectly confident as to that I shall have; for everybody knows that a cause undertaken by Fabrizio dei Monti is a cause gained."

At that instant a beautiful lady in a conspicuous dress passed us in an elegant *calèche*, and the conversation suddenly took a different turn. Lorenzo silently questioned his cousin with a look, and Lando began to give him in a low tone some information which an instinctive repugnance prevented me from listening to. . . .

I began (perhaps unjustly) to conceive a strong dislike to this Cousin Landolfo, and I imagine he would have been very much astonished had he guessed with what eye I now looked at his face, generally

considered so handsome. It was of a type often admired out of Italy because somewhat different from that foreigners are accustomed to, who have no idea to what a degree it is common in that country. A dark complexion, rather handsome eyes, fine teeth, and curly black hair, formed in my eyes a most unpleasing combination, and, without knowing a word they were saying, I felt positively certain he had never in his life uttered a syllable I should think worth listening to.

At length we left the boulevards, drove through the Champs Elysées, and at last found ourselves in the shade of the Bois de Boulogne. While my two companions were conversing together in a low tone, I abandoned myself to the pleasure of being in a cool place where I could breathe more freely; for, unaccustomed to going out during the middle of the day in summer, the heat had seemed overpowering. Apart from this, there was nothing here to strike a person accustomed to the loveliest scenery in the world. Unused as I was to Parisian life, the charm of which often produces an impression that effaces all others, the things I saw had no other prestige in my eyes than what they were in themselves.

Viewed in this light, the museums, churches, and palaces seemed less grand and magnificent than those we had seen before, and the promenades less picturesque and less varied. I missed particularly the lovely vistas which everywhere in Italy form the background of the picture, and attract the eye, and elevate the mind to something higher than the mere treasures of history and art that have accumulated in all old Italian cities.

And yet it cannot be denied that Paris has the power of making it-

self preferred to any other place in the world. It speaks a different language to every individual, and is comprehended by all. It is filled with treasures of every kind, and has wherewithal to gratify every taste indiscriminately, from that which is evil in its vilest form to an excess of goodness amounting to sublimity; from the most refined extravagance of fashion to the extreme renunciation of charity; and from pleasure in its most dangerous aspect to piety in its most perfect manifestations. It flatters vanity and vice more than

would be dared anywhere else, and yet it prides itself on being able to produce examples of goodness, devotedness, and humility that are almost unparalleled. In a word, every one, for a different reason, feels more at home there than anywhere else in the world. He who once learns to love Paris finds it difficult to like any other city as well; and he who has lived there finds it hard to resign himself to live in any other place. It is the one city on earth that has been able to vie with Rome in the honor of being the home of all nations. . . .

XIII.

THAT evening we went to the opera, the next night to the theatre; then came invitations without number to a series of dinners, *matinées*, and *soirées* that succeeded each other without intermission. I refrain from enumerating them, for I am writing the history of my soul rather than my exterior life. I will merely say, therefore, that after continuing this course several weeks, I found myself in a most singular and unhappy frame of mind. My thoughts, imagination, and whole mind became too much absorbed in the amusements and pleasures the young are often carried away with through curiosity and a superabundance of life and activity, which might be satisfied more completely, however, and in a less dangerous way, than by a career of pleasure, the almost inevitable effect of which is to produce a kind of intoxication. This intoxication overpowered me to a certain degree, but it left me, however, the faculty of realizing the change that had come over me, and I felt a painful desire to be what I once was. I had no peace of mind. I could not reflect or pray, even in my short intervals of leisure, and, in order to avoid the irksomeness of solitude, I gladly returned to the round of pleasure into which my husband liked to draw me. I had, it is true, the double safeguard of his love for me and my indifference to any other

admiration but his. A vague uneasiness sometimes crossed my mind like an ominous cloud, but I did not dream there could possibly be any danger for either of us in the enervating atmosphere of flattery and frivolity which we breathed more and more constantly.

Lorenzo continued to hover around me in public, or, if he remained at a distance, to watch me with an attention that was disagreeable because it seemed inexplicable. Nothing could have pleased me more than to have his eyes always meeting mine, and to find him everywhere near enough to speak to; but this was quite a different thing, for, even when I was not looking towards him, I could feel his persistent eyes fastened on me, and as soon as I raised my head he would turn away as if to avoid encountering my glance. Was it with love or pride that his eyes thus followed me? Was it not rather as if he expected to take me by surprise, or was mistrustful of me? When this doubt occurred to my mind, I felt the blood rush to my face, and love and pride revolt in my heart.

One day we were invited to a large dinner-party in one of those magnificent houses in Paris which have the now rare advantage of a fine garden. It was past the season for full dress, and I merely wore a white muslin trimmed with lace, and a wreath of flowers whose colors harmonized with that perfect

taste shown in everything at Paris. When I made my appearance, the whole company united in exclaiming that my fresh toilet was wonderfully becoming. Perhaps they were right. I was of an age that flowers suited better than jewels, and my complexion could bear the light of day without any danger. The days were now at their longest, so, in spite of the interminable length of a grand dinner, the delicious twilight hour was not quite gone when we rose from the table, and all issued forth through the windows into the garden. If ever the sight of the green grass, the leaves on the trees, the perfume and brilliancy of the flowers, and the varied hues of the sky as day declines, are more attractive and grateful at one time than another, it is certainly when contrasted with the stifling atmosphere, the air impregnated with the odor of dishes, and the brilliant artificial light, at a grand dinner in mid-summer. Therefore it was with inexpressible relief and an almost child-like joy I flew down the steps into the garden as soon as the master of the house left my movements free, and strolled along the broad alley that divided the lawn, inhaling with delight the freshness of the balmy air. . . . My life of pleasure had never quenched the ardent love of solitude that sometimes came over me, and I now longed to be alone. I desired this the more because I felt uneasy about a new change in Lorenzo's manner, and wished to reflect undisturbed on the inference I should draw from it.

For the first time since our arrival at Paris he had not, to my knowledge, watched one of my movements, though I had received more flattery that day, perhaps,

than ever before. . . . During the dinner he appeared devoted to his neighbors—on one side, a lady who was still beautiful, though no longer in the bloom of youth; and on the other, a young gentleman with a thoughtful, striking face, who grew animated whenever Lorenzo addressed him, and seemed to reply with much interest. I was told that the former was Mme. de B—, the other the young Count Gilbert de Kergy, "a great traveller also," added the master of the house, beside whom I was seated. "And it was solely the hope of meeting the Duca di Valenzano that induced him to accept my invitation to dine with us to-day. He does not care for the *grand monde*; and when he returns from one of his extensive journeys, he shuts himself up at home, or plunges into the charitable world, which is another *grand monde* little suspected by strangers who only come to Paris for a time."

All this might perhaps have interested me at some other time, but my mind was now occupied in trying to ascertain the reality of the change I had remarked. It was now my turn to give sly glances towards the other side of the table, but I did not once detect Lorenzo looking towards me. And yet it was not owing to the interest he took in the conversation. How many times I had seen him apparently absorbed in conversation, while a rapid glance of the eye convinced me he had been constantly attentive to every movement I made. There was nothing of this kind to-day. I knew him too well not to perceive the difference, but I did not know what to think of it, or if I had any reason to rejoice at it.

These thoughts beset me during

the trifling conversation that varies the *ennui* of a large dinner, and even prevented me from perceiving that our host was a gentleman of superior intelligence, and profiting by it. Before leaving the table, I stealthily turned my eyes once more in the direction they had so often taken within an hour. It was evident that Lorenzo did not trouble himself any more about me to-day than any other husband about his wife in public. But this time I perceived his young neighbor looking at me rather attentively, though with a look of seriousness almost amounting to austerity, very different from the glances so often encountered in the world which always made me lower my eyes. His inspired me with a kind of sympathy, and did not give me the slightest embarrassment.

I had, however, no opportunity for reflection during my walk, for I was almost immediately surrounded by friends, and I soon turned back to hunt for Lorenzo. Daylight was almost gone, which made it difficult to recognize any one; but at last I discovered him on the steps by means of his lofty stature and noble features, which were distinctly defined against the light of the *salon* within. Near him sat his next neighbor at dinner, holding a fan in her hand, and talking in an animated manner. Lorenzo appeared to be listening without making any attempt to reply. Once or twice he turned his head towards the garden. He was looking for me, perhaps. . . .

It had now grown entirely too dark to distinguish any one around me. I was standing motionless near a bench on which sat two or three gentlemen talking together.

"Mme. de B—— looks almost as handsome as ever this evening,"

said one of them. "One would really think she was trying to regain her ascendancy! . . ."

"It would be very difficult, however, to supplant that lovely, golden-haired Sicilian."

"Impossible, certainly, in the eyes of any other man; but in those of her husband, who knows?"

This was one of those speeches that are always flying at random, and striking the ear on every side in the world—speeches which one hears without listening to, but which weaken the moral sense, as physical diseases are produced by breathing dangerous miasmata too frequently. Since I had lived in this atmosphere many things of a similar nature had been said in my presence. Alas! it was sufficient to hear Lorenzo and Lando's conversation to learn how far light words of this kind can go. I therefore tried to attach no importance to the gossip I had thus accidentally overheard. Even if Lorenzo did formerly pay homage to this now somewhat faded beauty, why should I care? That did not trouble me for the moment. My only anxiety was to ascertain if his happening to meet her was the cause of the change I had observed, or if I must seek some other. In a word, ought I to be anxious or to rejoice?

Having escaped, in the almost utter darkness, from those who tried to detain me, I was slowly advancing towards the steps when I suddenly met Lorenzo. . . . He was in search of me, for he had on his arm my thin mantle of white cashmere, which he wrapped around my shoulders. I joyfully seized hold of his arm, and said in a low tone: "Pray do not go in yet, Lorenzo. Let us walk awhile in this beautiful covered alley."

He began to laugh. "That

would be very sentimental, said he, "for people who are no longer in their honey-moon; but no matter, I consent. *Honi soit qui mal y pense.* Besides, I see yonder an illuminated tent, where, I am told, they are preparing a musical surprise for us. Let us go in that direction."

We walked a short distance without speaking. There was nothing absolutely calculated to wound me in what he said, but his light, indifferent tone was not what I longed to hear. Amid all the excitement of fashionable society, I felt that his love constituted the only happiness of my life; and if I had supposed that to be the only cause of his vigilance and anxiety concerning me, I should never have sought to escape from it. But I had been doubtful about this, and felt so still. And I was too open, too confiding, and perhaps too petulant, to remain in doubt any longer.

"Let us stop here, Lorenzo," I said when we arrived at the end of the covered walk. "I see people coming this way. We can follow them into the tent, and it will be supposed we came with the crowd."

In fact, a brilliant *soirée* succeeded the dinner. The *salons* and garden were filled with company. The light from the tent extended to the place where we were standing, though we were out of sight. I sat down on a bench against a tree, and Lorenzo took a seat beside me.

"I have a question to ask you," said I suddenly. "Promise to give me a sincere reply."

He seemed surprised. He raised his eyebrows slightly, and his smiling face became clouded.

"I do not much like to be questioned, Ginevra, I forewarn you."

"But you always seem to like

to have me answer your questions."

"Yes, but without depending on it; for I know how to question and obtain an answer without giving you the trouble to reply."

"And is that why you look at me instead of speaking, and your eyes are always following me so attentively?"

He smiled, and made no reply for a while.

"Perhaps that has been the cause of my doing so till to day."

"Till to-day?"

"Yes; since you ask me, I confess it without any hesitation. Love does not always, among its privileges, possess the faculty of seeing clearly. Therefore I have been mistrustful of mine, and have not allowed it to influence me in the least in studying you."

I made a slight gesture of surprise.

"Listen, Ginevra. One never knows what a young soldier is till his first battle. Neither can one tell what a young woman of your age is till she appears on the terrible battle-field of the fashionable world. But if I have any faculty, it is, I believe, that of not being deceived in a study of this kind. Be assured, Ginevra, that from this time I shall watch you no more."

"Then, Lorenzo," said I, somewhat hurt, "you really watched me through suspicion, and all this time was necessary to convince you I am to be trusted?"

"I wished to see you under fire," said he, resuming his jesting tone. "Do not complain of this, ma belle Ginevra. You have come out of the trial victorious—victorious to such a degree that, though I thought you more charming to-day than ever, I have not once thought of watching you. And yet," con-

tinued he in a tone he tried to render playful, but which was bitter in spite of himself, "those flowers that are so becoming to you are not all calculated to reassure me." And plucking a red carnation from my wreath, he held it up before me with a smile that seemed cruel, and was about to put it in his button-hole when, pale as death, I snatched it from his hand, and threw it as far as I could.

"Lorenzo!" I said in a trembling voice, "you are ungenerous! . . . and you are very unjust! . . ."

I should have done better to say, as well as think, that he did not know what he was doing. No; he little knew what had taken place in my soul since the day he thus recalled, which was so sanguinary, so fatal in its results. No; he could not conceive the intolerable pain he gave me by thus suddenly reviv-

ing my regret, my sorrow, and my shame! . . .

He could read my heart to a certain extent, but how far he was—alas! how incapable he was—of penetrating to the bottom of my soul, and fully comprehending, or even suspecting, the radical change which that one day had wrought in my nature.

He saw with surprise and alarm my agitation and the sudden palleness of my face, and endeavored to calm me; but I noticed he was at once anxious and annoyed about the emotion he had excited.

I made a violent effort to regain my self-control, and soon succeeded in allaying the throbbing of my heart. But I felt as if an icy wind had crossed my path, chilling too soon the opening flowers of my dawning happiness, and causing them to droop their heads.

XIV.

From that day Lorenzo, as he promised, ceased to manifest any interest in what I did in society. But this apparent confidence afforded me no pleasure. I remained painfully wounded at what had passed between us. I considered his suspicions even more humiliating than those of my father, and began to feel that the fault I had so greatly deplored had not merited so long and cruel a chastisement.

Moreover, I was only relieved from the anxiety caused by his vigilance to experience another which was soon to increase and reveal to me at last my true destiny. It did not, in fact, require a long time to discover that Lorenzo's new attitude was sometimes less like confidence than indifference. It frequently happened that I searched a long time for him in the

different salons where we were accustomed to spend all our evenings, without being able to find him. One day I perceived him talking in a very animated manner with Mme. de B—, and, when I approached, I fancied there was a slight expression of displeasure in his face, which, though promptly concealed, was sufficient to cause me a painful sensation of embarrassment.

When we were alone, however, I found him unchanged. His manner towards me had lost nothing of its charm; he seemed as affectionate as ever, and yet an invisible barrier had risen between us, which was constantly increasing, and I began to experience a feeling of solitude that was especially painful in society, but from which I was nowhere completely exempt.

But the success of my first appearance in the world had now given way to that of fashion. The arrival of some foreign prince, whose name I no longer remember, prolonged the gay season at Paris this year, and one reunion succeeded another as if it were carnival time. There was not one to which I was not invited, and, though an undeniable need of rest began to overpower the feverish activity that for some time had come over me, I was unable to stop, for I began to perceive that a quiet, tranquil life was insupportable to Lorenzo unless in his studio. Out of that, he wished to be incessantly in motion, and, as he could not now seriously resume his artist life, he gave himself up entirely to that of the world, and was not yet indifferent to the pleasure of having me accompany him.

It was therefore impossible for me to extricate myself from the giddy round of which I had grown so weary, and I sometimes envied those who were satisfied with the mere pleasure of attracting attention. I felt astonished then, and I still am, at the wonderful part played by vanity in these gayeties, which are so different to those who participate in them from what they seem to the crowd who are excluded. The music, the dancing, the splendid apartments, the gayety of youth requisite to enjoy all this, and, to crown the whole, the pleasure of meeting those who are dear, are the chief attractions and keenest enjoyments which cause those who have the power of exhausting them to be envied by all who are deprived of them. If this were really all, such a life would be ennobled to a certain degree in my eyes, for its dangers and its pleasures would at least be commensu-

rate with the love and the disapprobation of which they are the object. But the seductions of the world consist chiefly in the satisfaction of eclipsing others, and the intoxication it causes is almost always produced, not by the pleasure it gives, but by the vanity of those who mingle in it. This seems strange when we reflect upon it, and we can see, without rising very high, that not only happiness, but pleasure, and even amusement, can find a better source; and consequently those who really possess these envied blessings are the people who are supposed to be the most debarred from them.

As for me, I was no longer light-hearted, but I tried to appear so in society; for the sad expression I could not always disguise had excited some observations that wounded my pride.

"What! the fair Ginevra really melancholy?" said Lando Landi, sitting down beside me one evening at a concert, and speaking in the familiar tone authorized by his relationship, but which was none the less displeasing. "I have always denied it, because you are so invariably cheerful when I see you out of this everlasting din, as I do every day. I only supposed you a little weary of so gay a life—a thing conceivable, even in your case, for one gets tired of everything, even of turning people's heads; but this evening you really have the air of a tragic muse."

"I am a little fatigued, that is all."

"Listen to me, cousin, and do not treat me so badly. I see you do not like me, which proves I am not self-conceited; and I am not angry with you, which proves I am not malicious. Moreover, I greatly admire and love you, and yet (give

me some credit for this) I do not pay court to you."

"Come, Lando, no more of such jests, but come to the point."

"I was about to beg you to show some confidence in me. You are sad, and I will tell you why: you have heard some nonsensical gossip about Lorenzo. Now, cousin, let me tell you . . ."

"What gossip?" I asked, turning red with an air of displeasure.

"You understand me perfectly well. I am certain I tell you nothing new. It may seem presuming to speak of this, but I must justify Lorenzo. Believe what I say, and do not attach any importance to a passing politeness in memory of former times, which means nothing, and really does not, on my word of honor, merit such a flash from your beautiful eyes."

He had indeed found the means of making them flame up.

"Really, Lando," said I haughtily, "it would serve you right if I never spoke to you again."

But he was evidently so seriously astonished that I saw I was wrong. He had been presuming without knowing it or intending it. I therefore continued in a milder tone:

"I assure you, you are absolutely mistaken. I am neither sad nor anxious, . . . only a little *ennuyée*, that is all. And to-night I am sleepy, and wish to return home as soon as possible. Give me your arm, and let us go in search of Lorenzo."

"It is not much after midnight," he said; "you must really remain a while longer to hear the last two pieces."

"No, I tell you I have had enough of it. But if you wish to remain here, you need not feel obliged to escort me. The first

person I meet will render me that service."

"*Ma che!*" said he, rising and shaking his head, as he concluded to give me his arm.

We began our voyage of discovery through the long row of *salons*, but could not find Lorenzo anywhere. Lando said nothing, but I noticed he cast a quick, mistrustful glance around every room we entered, and it occurred to me he had not told the truth, but merely wished to reassure me when he knew Lorenzo was having a *tête-à-tête* it was as humiliating for me to be ignorant of as to discover. Lando had touched a sorcer spot than I was willing he should see. For in spite of an apparently very frank explanation on this point from Lorenzo himself a few days before, suspicion had entered my heart, and I was in constant need of being reassured. Was not this acknowledging I already had reason to tremble?

At length we arrived at the last *salon* Lorenzo was not there. There was only a small room beyond, not as well lighted as the rest.

"That is the library," explained Lando in his way; "or, at least, a cabinet full of books, where no one ever goes."

An almost imperceptible movement of his arm made me feel he wished to prevent me from entering. This was enough to induce me to go straight to the door, where I stopped short, at once reassured and amazed. Four men were there by themselves, sitting around a card-table with a green covering. Two of them were playing, and Lorenzo was one of them; the others followed the game with the most intense interest. I remained leaning against the door, motionless, and my eyes fastened on him.

Was that really Lorenzo? . . . What a change in his countenance! . . . What a strange expression in his mobile face! He did not perceive me, and I felt that my voice would have sounded in his ear in vain. He neither saw nor heard anything around him. His looks, his attention, his mind, and his whole being seemed absorbed in the cards he held in his hand. He was calm, but his slightly-compressed eyebrows showed that luck was against him.

In a few minutes he drew a roll of gold pieces from his pocket, and threw them on the table. His opponent rose, but Lorenzo remained in his seat, and began a new game with one of those who had been watching the old one.

"Take a seat here," said Lando, leading me towards one of the sofas in the room where we were. "I am going to tell Lorenzo you are waiting for him. Do not go in yourself."

I made a sign of assent, and for the first time gave Lando credit for some tact. His usually smiling face had, moreover, an air of anxious solicitude that not only surprised me, but redoubled the strange, unexpected shock I had just experienced. He went into the next room, and, after waiting a long time, I at last saw him come out; but he was alone.

"It is impossible to speak to him till the end of the game," he said in a tone of vexation. Then, after a moment's silence, he added with a forced laugh: "My dear cousin, you would have done much better to follow my advice and wait for Lorenzo in the concert-room instead of coming here after him. But since you persisted in doing so, allow me to give you one bit of advice, now you have caught him

falling into his old bad habit again."

"Again?" I said with an air of surprise.

"Well, yes. . . . For a year he did not touch a card, he told me, for he well knew that for him the mere touch was like a spark that kindles a fire. He vowed—not to play moderately, for he is incapable of moderation in anything—but never to touch a card again, and he expressed great satisfaction some days since that he had kept his promise so faithfully. But to-day he has broken it. Who knows what will happen to-morrow? Make use, therefore, of the influence you still have over him; use all the persuasive powers you possess to induce him to resolve once more on a wise course. It is a thing, you may be sure, that threatens your happiness, as well as his, a thousand times more than all the fair ones in the past, present, or future who should attempt to rival you!"

In spite of all that was displeasing in Lando's manner, language, and sentiments, and even in the expressions he made use of in giving me this advice, I felt it was dictated by sincere interest, and it touched me. I felt weighed down by this new trouble. This was a fear I had never experienced before. It was absolutely foreign to everything that had crossed my mind. Was this to live, love, and be happy? Everything around me looked dark, and the night seemed to penetrate to my very soul.

The time I had to wait seemed interminable. The concert was over, the rooms were growing empty, and we were to be the last. I rose with an impatience I could no longer control, and went again to the cabinet. Lorenzo was rising from the table just as I entered.

I saw him slip another roll of money into his opponent's hands. Then he came towards me with his usual expression. It was evident he had no suspicion of my having been so near him for more than an hour.

"Excuse me, Ginevra," said he. "What! is the concert over? And you had to search for me? . . . It is unpardonable; but I had no idea they would get to the end of that interminable programme so early."

"But it is nearly two o'clock," said I.

He glanced towards the clock, and looked surprised. Lando, meanwhile, had hurried away to get my cloak; but he soon returned with it, saying the carriage was waiting for us. I entered it with Lorenzo, after giving my hand more cordially to his cousin than I had ever done before.

On the way home Lorenzo, after a long silence, thought proper to explain that he had got tired of the concert, and for amusement had had recourse to a game of *écarté*. Lando's words were still in my ears. My heart, too, was filled

with inexpressible anxiety and profound affection for this dear partner of my life who was so charming in manner, and whom it would have been so sweet to love in peace! I leaned my head against his shoulder, and, passing my arm through his, said:

"Lorenzo, if I take the liberty of giving you one word of advice, will you follow it? If I beg you to make me one promise—a promise that will render me happy—will you not grant it?"

He made so abrupt a movement that I was almost frightened. But he immediately resumed his self-control, and, softly kissing my hand and forehead, said in a tone that was not rude, but which seemed to forbid all reply:

"Ginevra, I think I told you the other day that I do not like to be questioned, and I now tell you that I like advice still less, and, above all, I cannot bear to make promises. So let this warning suffice. Avoid these three shoals, if you wish to remain in my eyes what I now consider you—the most charming of women."

xv.

The following day was Sunday. Notwithstanding so fatiguing an evening, the lateness of the hour when I retired, and the restless night that followed, I was ready for Mass at the usual hour. But for the first time since my marriage Lorenzo sent me word not to wait for him. Of course I had never been under any great illusion as to his religious sentiments. I supposed that habit, rather than piety, induced him to accompany me to church; but I was far from suspecting that he had hitherto made it a point to do so because he thought

it necessary to keep an eye on me there as well as elsewhere. Above all, I little expected the habit to be laid aside as soon as he was reassured or became interested in something else. I consoled myself on this occasion by thinking he would go to a later Mass; and for the first time I went out alone and on foot, the distance being so short between our hotel in the Rue de Rivoli and the Church of St. Roch.

The life I had led for two months was not precisely adapted to dispose my soul for prayer. Besides, ac-

customed as I had been to the churches of Italy, those at Paris seemed destitute of all beauty, and I found it difficult to get used to so different an aspect. But other impressions soon modified this. The goodness and piety that so thoroughly impregnated the atmosphere which surrounded my childhood were rather the spirit of our family than of the land that had providentially given me birth. And yet there is, in Sicily, as well as all Southern Italy, a great deal of faith, though it cannot be denied that, at this time, great moral relaxation and religious indifference were too prevalent, especially among those who belonged to the upper classes. There, more than anywhere else even, holy souls led hidden lives, and edification was rather to be found in the obscurity of certain firesides than in the world at large, or even in the usages of public worship. All the religious exercises of our family were performed in the chapel of the old palace we occupied. This chapel was spacious, richly ornamented, and architecturally beautiful. We not only heard Mass there on Sundays, but every day, and two or three times a week Don Placido gave us an instructive, edifying discourse. My father, mother, Livia, Ottavia, Mario (who, in spite of his faults, retained his respect for holy things), and several faithful old servants constituted the attentive, devout congregation. My childhood was not wanting in any of those influences that have so powerful an effect on after-life. Ottavia often took Livia and myself to the evening Benediction in one of the neighboring churches, and my heart still throbs at the remembrance of the pious transport with which I knelt before the illuminated tabernacle

on which stood the monstrance. The church used to be filled solely by people of the humbler classes, even on festivals. It was a rare thing to find a single person belonging to the upper classes. What struck me, therefore, above all, at Paris, was the complete difference of the churches in this respect. I was at first even more surprised than edified. For if I had often remarked the absence of the wealthy in Sicily, here I was struck with the absence of the poor. I looked around for the people clothed in rags, whose fervor had so often redoubled mine, and did not like to feel that I was separated from them. This separation is much more marked where the custom of private chapels has been established. Christian equality calls the rich and great to the foot of the altar, no less than the poor and lowly; and if they do not all meet there, whether in France or Italy, we cannot blame those whose attendance at church is an example to the absent, whatever rank they may belong to.

But to return to this Sunday morning. I knelt down and heard Mass with much less distraction than usual. I was, it is true, rather sad than devout at the time, but I prayed more fervently than I had done for a long time, and, when I slowly and reluctantly left the church, the inner soul, that resounds like a lyre under the divine hand, had received a slight touch, and for the first time for a long while I felt the movement of one of those hidden chords that cannot be sounded without causing all the others to vibrate.

As I approached the door of the church, I noticed a young girl kneeling on a chair, whose face did not seem wholly unknown to me. She held a purse in her hand, and

was soliciting contributions for orphans. I deposited my offering, and received her smiling thanks in return. As I passed on, I heard her whisper my name to a lady of noble and distinguished appearance beside her (whom I supposed to be her mother), who, with her eyes fastened on her book, had not observed me. As I went on, I recollecting having met this pretty girl two or three times in company, but did not know her name. I felt surprised that she should know mine, though this often happens to strangers who are pointed out as objects of curiosity, while they only know a few of those around them.

I had no time, however, to dwell on this accidental meeting, or quietly enjoy the impressions left by the services at church; for Lorenzo's first words immediately revived all the recollections of the morning.

"You are late, Ginevra," said he. "It is half-past eleven. Breakfast is waiting, and I am in a hurry."

We took seats at the table in silence, but he soon resumed:

"You have scarcely time to dress. Have you forgotten that we are going to the races? Lando Landi is to come for us before one o'clock."

Yes, I had completely forgotten it. I felt an earnest desire to withdraw from the engagement. I wanted one day of peace and quiet repose. I felt the need of drinking in more deeply the breath of pure air I had just tasted. Could I not have a few hours to myself? Must I at once go where I should inhale a different atmosphere? And what an atmosphere! . . .

Seeing that I remained silent and had a pensive air, he said in an impatient tone:

"Well, Ginevra, what is it?

What have you to tell me or ask me? . . ."

I replied without any circumlocution: "I have nothing to say, except that I am tired to death of those races, and beg you to excuse me from accompanying you to-day."

His face immediately cleared up. "Is that all?" said he. "As to that, you are at perfect liberty to do as you please. You may be sure," continued he, laughing, "that I shall only contradict you on great occasions. . . . But what will you do with yourself this afternoon, if you do not go to the races?"

"I shall do like everybody else in France—go to Vespers."

He gave a derisive laugh that was horrible.

"Everybody else, do you say? It would be very difficult to tell how many in Paris even go to Mass!"

I looked at him, as he said this. He understood my meaning, and appeared displeased.

"Come, Ginevra," said he in an ill-humored manner, "are you going to insist that I must always agree with you?"

"By no means, Lorenzo, you know very well."

"But you did not like it because you had to go to church without me this morning."

I hesitated an instant, but at last replied with some emotion:

"Of course I love to have you with me wherever I go, and more especially there; but it would be better, however, for you to go to church always without me than ever to go *solely* for me."

This reply increased his displeasure, and he said in a tone he had never used before:

"Unfortunately, the truth is, my dear child, if I should consult my own inclinations, I might perhaps never go at all."

Tears came into my eyes, and my heart ached with the strongest feeling of grief I had ever experienced! . . .

O my God! . . . I must have had some love for thee, even at that time, since the very thought of any one's not loving thee caused me so much pain! . . .

Lorenzo's tone, look, and whole manner not only showed his utter indifference, but the complete incredulity he felt. I had never suspected it before, because it was something foreign to my experience. I knew it was possible to violate the law of God, but did not know it could be denied. I understood lukewarmness and negligence, for I had seen both in others as well as in him; but I had never before encountered lack of repentance and ignorance of duty. This cold denial of any love for God and of all belief in him Lorenzo, of course, had not expressly declared, but it had been betrayed by his manner doubtless even more than he would have wished. With all the inconsistencies of my character and the faults of my age, he must have seen that I had too lively and profound a faith not to be displeased at anything that jarred on it, and heretofore he had been circumspect without being hypocritical.

He saw the effect he had produced, and, as he had not become indifferent to me, he regretted it; but he knew he could not at once repair his mistake, and contented himself for the moment by trying to divert my mind from it by a change of subject. And I likewise felt it would be better to talk of something else. This prudence was by no means natural to my disposition, but I began to understand his. Besides, his injunc-

tions of the evening before were still too recent to be forgotten.

The conversation did not last long, for Lando, punctual to his engagement, arrived at half-past twelve with a beaming face, a flower in his button-hole, and in his hand an enormous bunch of violets destined for me.

"What!" he exclaimed when he learned my intentions for the afternoon. . . . "But that is impossible! Not go to the races? Why, you must. Remain at home when the weather is the finest in the world? I never heard of such a thing. . . . Deprive me of the pleasure of taking you in my *câlèche*, and making everybody envy me? . . . That is the most cruel caprice that ever entered a woman's head! . . ."

Here Lorenzo left the room an instant to look for his hat, and Lando suddenly began in another tone: "I am in earnest, cousin. You would do much better to go."

What did he mean? I remained doubtful and troubled, but Lorenzo immediately returned, and I had no time for reflection. As they were leaving the room, my husband approached, and, taking me by the hand, looked at me with an expression his eyes now and then assumed, and which always dispersed, as by some enchantment, the clouds that rose too often between us. He slightly caressed my cheek with the glove in his hand, and whispered with a smile:

"Come, Ginevra mia, do not be angry. Let me see you smile again."

Then turning towards Lando, "It is not yet one o'clock," he said. "Let us start, and, before going to the Bois de Boulogne, we will stop at the Madeleine."

His looks, as well as his words, allayed my anxiety; but a thousand different ideas crossed my mind, and after they were gone I remained thoughtfully leaning on the balustrade of my balcony, where I followed them with my eyes to the end of the street, wondering what Lando meant, and if I had really done wrong not to accompany them.

The weather at that time was fine. The clearness of the sky, as well as the verdure of the trees, attracted my attention more than the aspect of the street, and of the garden already filled with the crowd of animated, happy, and gayly-dressed people, that give every pleasant summer day at Paris the appearance of a festival. But I was absorbed in my own thoughts, and looked at it all without noticing anything. I had a vague feeling that, among the dangers that seemed to encompass me in the new life into which I had been thrown, there were two I had special reason to dread. The first—the greatest—would have broken my heart, and on that I could not dwell for an instant. . . . The second threatened the loss of our property, and would diminish our income, if not absolutely ruin us. This, too was alarming, but much less so than the other in my eyes, though just the contrary in Lando's estimation, if I read him aright. After considerable reflection, I concluded that he merely referred to something of the same nature he had alluded to the evening before, and I put it aside to ask myself with far deeper anxiety if I had really had a glimpse of Lorenzo's heart, as he looked at me on leaving the room, or whether he was playing a part, and deliberately deceiving me. The heavenly expression that some-

times beamed from his eyes always inspired me with a confidence in him that was equal to my affection. I had just experienced its effect. The look, however, was so transient that it rather resembled the reflection of a distant light than any actual, real feeling. Whereas his mocking laugh and the tone that to-day for the first time accompanied it were—alas! I could not doubt it—the expression of his real sentiments, and this contradiction terrified me. . . . He seemed to possess two natures, and my head grew weary in trying to decide which of the two was his real one—a question I frequently had occasion to ask afterwards, and to wait a long time for the reply—as doubtful to him then as it was to myself. . . .

I left the window, and, buried in an arm-chair, I allowed the time to pass away in reflections of this kind without opening the book I held in my hand, or noticing the gradual obscurity of the sky, that a short time before had been so clear. It was not threatening enough, however, to hinder me from going on foot to Vespers, which it was nearly time for, the hour not being as late at S. Roch's as elsewhere. I started without any delay, giving orders for my carriage to be at the church door at the end of the service.

The salutary impressions of the morning and the excessive anxiety and sadness that I afterwards experienced had somewhat counteracted the more or less unhealthy influences that result from a continued life of pleasure. I was now in that frame of mind when it is easy to collect one's thoughts; when the soul, so to speak, flies to the first place of refuge in which it is sure of repose. . . . Who has

not experienced the strange, mysterious, refreshing influence of prayer, even when mute and inarticulate? . . . Who has not, in this way, laid down for an instant all his sorrows, all his fears, all his sufferings, and afterwards taken up the load again with a renewed strength that seemed to have lightened the burden? . . .

I had suffered but little at that time in comparison with what life still had in reserve for me. But after a while we learn to suffer, and in this science, as in all others, it is the beginning one always finds the most difficult. A fearful storm, it is true, had assailed the first flower of my spring-time, and spread darkness and gloom over the heavens of my sixteenth year; but spring-time and the sun returned, and at an age when others only begin life I was commencing mine the second time. But this new life of happiness was, I now felt, threatened in a thousand ways. Apprehension, a worse torture than sadness; a vague, undefined fear, more difficult to endure than the woes it anticipates; the uncertainty, doubt, and suspicion, so much more intolerable to one of my nature than any positive suffering, rendered my heart heavy and depressed, and I felt it would be a relief to weep as well as to pray.

I knelt on the only vacant chair in the church, and remained a long time motionless, my face buried in my hands, unable to give utterance to my wants, but knowing God could read my heart, as, when we meet a friend after a long separation, we are often silent merely because we have so much to communicate, and know not where to begin. In this attitude I heard Vespers sung for the first time in my life, this office of the church

being, as is well known, much less frequently used in the south of Italy than in other places. I have already mentioned the public religious observances of my childhood. I had, therefore, never heard Vespers chanted in this way. The voices of the choristers were harmonious, and the responses were no less so. A large number of the congregation joined in the chant. There was something monotonous rather than musical in it, but it was more musical than reading, and it produced a strangely soothing influence on me. I laid aside all thought of myself, and attentively followed the admirable lines of the Psalmist; and when the Magnificat was intoned, I rose with the whole congregation to chant this divine hymn with a sensation of joy and hope that, for the moment, made me forget the painful impressions I felt when I entered beneath these arches now resounding with its words. . . .

Benediction followed, recalling the earliest, dearest remembrances of my childhood, and increasing the emotion I already felt. When the monstrance containing the divine Host was placed above the altar, I lost all thought of where I was. I forgot whether it was Paris, Rome, or Messina, and whether the arches above me were those of some magnificent church, or some humble chapel, or a mere oratory like that in which I had prayed from my childhood. What difference did it make? The sun shines everywhere alike, and diffuses equal light in all places. How much more truly shines throughout the whole Catholic world the living, uncreated Light, present on all our altars! Time and place were forgotten. I was once more with my beloved mother, once more with Livia, my

sweet, saintly sister, and the faithful Ottavia; and when, at the end of one of those hymns that are usually sung before the Blessed Sacrament, a young voice, pure and clear, uttered the word

*Patria,** it seemed at that moment to have a double meaning, and designate, not only my earthly, but my heavenly country.

* In the *O Salutaris Hostia!*

XVI.

As soon as I rose from my place I perceived the young lady who had been collecting money in the morning not far off. She was going by with her mother without observing me, and I followed in the crowd that was making its way to the door. But a pouring rain was falling from the clouds which were so threatening two hours before, and a great many who were going out suddenly stopped and came back to remain under shelter during the shower. In consequence of this I all at once found myself beside the young lady, who was diligently seeking her mother, from whom she had been separated by the crowd. She observed me this time, and with a child-like smile and a tone of mingled terror and confidence that were equally touching, said :

"Excuse me, madame, but, as you are taller than I, please tell me if you see my mother—a lady in black with a gray hat."

"Yes," I replied, "I see her, and she is looking for you also. I will aid you in reaching her."

We had some trouble in opening a passage, but after some time succeeded in getting to the place where her mother had been pushed by the crowd at some distance from the door of the church. She was looking anxiously in every direction, and when she saw us her face lighted up, and she thanked me with equal simplicity and grace

of manner for the service I had rendered her daughter. We conversed together for some minutes, during which I learned that though I had met them twice that day in the same church, it was not the one they usually attended, their home being in another quarter of the city. The daughter had been invited to collect money at S. Roch's that day, and wishing, for some reason, to be at home by four o'clock, they had returned for the afternoon service, which ends an hour earlier there than anywhere else. This variation from their usual custom had probably caused a misunderstanding about the carriage which should have been at the door, and they felt embarrassed about getting to the Rue St. Dominique, where they resided, as the violent rain prevented them from going on foot. Glad to be able to extricate them from their embarrassment, I at once offered to take them home in my carriage, which was at the door. They accepted the offer with gratitude. Their manners and language would have left no doubt as to their rank, even if I had not met them in society. And I soon learned more than enough to satisfy me on this point.

As soon as we were seated in the carriage the elder of the two ladies said : "I know whom I have to thank for the favor you have done me, madame, for no one can forget

the Duchessa di Valenzano who has ever seen her, even but once, and no one can be ignorant of her name, which is in every mouth. But it is not the same with us. Allow me, therefore, to say that I am the Comtesse de Kergy, and this is my daughter Diana, . . . who is very happy, I assure you, as well as surprised, at the accident that has brought her in contact with one she has talked incessantly about ever since she had the happiness of seeing you first."

Her daughter blushed at these words, but did not turn away her eyes, which were fastened on me with a sympathetic expression of charming *naïveté* that inspired an irresistible attraction towards her in return. The name of Kergy was a well-known one. I had heard it more than once, and was trying to recall when and where I heard it for the first time, when, as we were crossing the Place du Carrousel, the young Diana, looking at the clock on the Tuilleries, suddenly exclaimed :

"It is just going to strike four. We ought to feel greatly obliged to madame, mamma for, had it not been for her, we should have been extremely late, and Gilbert would have been surprised and anxious at our not arriving punctually."

Gilbert! . . . This name refreshed my memory. Gilbert de Kergy was the name of the young traveller whom I had once seen at the large dinner-party. He must be the very person in question. . . . Before I had time to ask, Mme. de Kergy put an end to my uncertainty on the subject.

"My son," said she, "has recently made an interesting tour in the Southern States of America, and it is with respect to this journey there is to be a discussion to-day which

we promised to attend. I have given up my large *salon* for the purpose, on condition (a condition Dinia proposed) that the meeting should end with a small collection in behalf of the orphan asylum for which she was soliciting contributions this morning—a work in which she is greatly interested."

"My husband, who has also travelled a great deal," I replied, "had, I believe, the pleasure of meeting M. de Kergy on one occasion, and conversing with him."

"Gilbert has not forgotten the conversation," exclaimed the young Diana with animation. "He often speaks of it. He told us about you also, madame, and described you so accurately that I knew you at once as soon as I saw you, before any one told me your name."

I made no reply, and we remained silent till, having crossed the bridge, we approached the Rue St. Dominique, when Diana, suddenly leaning towards her mother, whispered a few words in her ear. Mme. de Kergy began to laugh.

"Really," said she, "this child takes everything for granted; but you are so kind, I will allow her to repeat aloud what she has just said to me."

"Well," said the young girl, "I said the discussion would certainly be interesting, for Gilbert is to take a part in it, as well as several other good speakers, and those who attend will at the close aid in a good work. I added that I should be very much pleased, madame, if you would attend."

I was by no means prepared for this invitation, and at first did not know what reply to make, but quickly bethought myself that there would be more than an hour before Lorenzo's return. I knew, moreover, that, even according to his ideas, I should

be in very good society, and it could not displease him in the least if I attended a discussion at the Hôtel de Kergy under the auspices of the countess and her daughter. Besides, on my part, I felt a good deal of curiosity, never having attended anything like a public discussion. In short, I decided, without much hesitation, to accept the invitation, and the young Diana clapped her hands with joy. We were just entering the open *porte-cochère* of a large court, where we found quite a number of equipages and footmen. The carriage stopped before the steps and in five minutes I was seated between Diana and her mother near a platform at one end of a drawing-room large enough to contain one hundred and fifty or two hundred persons.

I cannot now give a particular account of this meeting, though it was an event in my life. The principal subject discussed was, I think, the condition of the blacks, not yet emancipated, in the Southern States of America. An American of the North, who could express himself very readily in French, first spoke, and after him a missionary priest, who considered the question from a no less elevated point of view, though quite different from that of the philanthropist, and the discussion had already grown quite animated before it became Gilbert de Kergy's turn to speak. When he rose, there was a movement in the whole assembly, and his first words excited involuntary attention, which soon grew to intense interest, and for the first time in my life I felt the power of language and the effect that eloquence can produce.

It was strange, but he began with a brief, brilliant sketch of places that seemed familiar to me; for Lo-

renzo had visited them, and he had such an aptness for description that I felt as if I had seen them in his company. My first thought was to regret his absence. Why was he not here with me now to listen to this discussion, to become interested in it, and perhaps take a part in it? . . . I had a vague feeling that this reunion was of a nature to render him as he appeared to me during the first days of our wedded life, when his extensive travels and noble traits made me admire his courage and recognize his genius, the prestige of which was only surpassed in my eyes by that of his tenderness! . . . But another motive intensified this desire and regret. The boldness, the intelligence, and the adventurous spirit of the young traveller were, of course, traits familiar to me, and which I was happy and proud to recognize; but, alas! the resemblance ceased when, quitting the field of observation and descriptions of nature, and all that memory and intelligence can glean, the orator soared to loftier regions, and linked these facts themselves with questions of a higher nature and wider scope than those of mere earthly interest. He did this with simplicity, earnestness, and consummate ability, and while he was speaking I felt that my mind rose without difficulty to the level of his, and expanded suddenly as if it had wings! It was a moment of keen enjoyment, but likewise of keen suffering; for I felt the difference that the greater or less elevation of the soul can produce in two minds that are equally gifted! I clearly saw what was wanting in Lorenzo's. I recognized the cause of the something lacking which had so often troubled me, and I felt more intensely and profoundly pained than I had that very morning.

While listening to Gilbert I only thought of Lorenzo, and, if I reluctantly acknowledged the superiority of the former, I felt at the same time that there was nothing to prevent the latter from becoming his equal; for, I again said to myself, Lorenzo was not merely a man of the world, leading a frivolous, aimless life, as might seem from his present habits. Love of labor and love of nature and art do not characterize such a man, and he possessed these traits in a high degree. He had therefore to be merely detached from other influences. This was my task, my duty, and it should also be my happiness; for I had no positive love for the world, whose pleasures I knew so well. No, I did not love it. I loved what was higher and better than that. I felt an immense void within that great things alone could fill. And I seemed to-day to have entered into the sphere of these great things; but I was there alone, and this was torture. All my actual impressions were therefore centred in an ardent desire to put an end to this solitude by drawing into that higher region him from whom I was at the moment doubly separated.

This was assuredly a pure and legitimate desire, but I did not believe myself capable of obtaining its realization without difficulty, and sufficiently calculating the price I must pay for such a victory and the efforts by which it must often be merited. . . .

While these thoughts were succeeding each other in my mind I almost forgot to listen to the end of the discourse, which terminated the meeting in the midst of the applause of the entire audience. The vast hall of discussion was instantly changed into a *salon* again, where everybody seemed to be acquaint-

ed, and where I found the *elite* of those I had met in other places. But assembled together for so legitimate an object, they at once inspired me with interest, respect, and a feeling of attraction. It was Paris under quite a new aspect, and it seemed to me, if I had lived in a world like this, I should never have experienced the terrible distress which I have spoken of, and which the various emotions of the day had alone succeeded in dissipating.

The charming young Diana, light and active, had ascended the platform, and was now talking to her brother. Gilbert started with surprise at her first words, and his eyes turned towards the place where I was standing. Then I almost instantly saw them descend from the platform and come towards me. Diana looked triumphant.

"This is my brother Gilbert, madame," said she, her eyes sparkling. "And it is I who have the honor of presenting him to you, as he seems to have waited for his little sister to do it."

He addressed me some words of salutation, to which I responded. As he stood near me, I again observed his calm, thoughtful, intelligent face, which had struck me so much the only time I remembered to have seen him before. While speaking a few moments previous his face was animated, and his eyes flashed with a fire that added more than once to the effect of his clear, penetrating voice, which was always well modulated. His gestures also, though not numerous or studied, had a natural grace and the dignity which strength of conviction, joined to brilliant eloquence, gives to the entire form of an orator. His manner was now so simple that I felt perfectly at ease with him, and told him without any hesitation how

happy I was at the double good-fortune that had brought me in contact with his sister, and had resulted in my coming to this meeting where I had been permitted to hear him speak.

"This day will be a memorable one for me as well as for her, madame," he replied, "and I shall never forget it."

There was not the least inflection in his voice to make me regard his words as anything more than mere politeness, but their evident sincerity caused me a momentary embarrassment. He seemed to attach too much importance to this meeting, but it passed away. He inspired me with almost as much confidence as if he had been a friend. I compared him with Lanzolfo, and wondered what effect so different an influence would have on Lorenzo, and I could not help wishing he were his friend also. . . .

I continued silent, and he soon resumed: "The Duca di Valenzano is not here?"

"No; he will be sorry, and I regret it for his sake."

"The presence of such a traveller would have been a great honor to us."

"He was very happy to have an opportunity of conversing with you on one occasion."

"It was a conversation I have never forgotten. It would have been for my advantage to renew it, but I never go into society—at Paris."

"And elsewhere?"

"Elsewhere it is a different thing," said he, smiling. "I am as social while travelling as I am uncivilized at my return."

"We must not expect, then, to meet you again in Paris; but if you ever go to Italy, may we not hope you will come to see us?"

"If you will allow me to do so," said he eagerly.

"Yes, certainly. I think I can promise that the well-known hospitality of the Neapolitans will not be wanting towards the Comte Gilbert de Kergy."

After a moment's silence he resumed: "You must have been absent when I was at Naples. That was two years ago."

"I was not married then, and I am not a Neapolitan."

"And not an Italian, perhaps."

"Do you say so on account of the color of my hair? That would be astonishing on the part of so observant a traveller, for you must have noticed that our great masters had almost as many blondes as brunettes for their models. However, I am neither English nor German, as perhaps you are tempted to think. I am a Sicilian."

"I have never seen in Sicily or anywhere else a person who resembled you."

These words implied a compliment, and probably such an one as I had never received; and, I need not repeat, I was not fond of compliments. But this was said without the least smile or the slightest look that indicated any desire to flatter or please me. Was not this a more subtle flattery than I had been accustomed to receive? . . . And did it not awaken unawares the vanity I had long thought rooted out of the bottom of my heart? I can affirm nothing positive as to this, for there is always something lacking in the knowledge of one's self, however thoroughly we may think we have acquired it. But I am certain it never occurred to me at the time to analyze the effect of this meeting on me. I was wholly absorbed in the regret and hope it awakened.

As I was on the point of leaving, Mme. de Kergy asked permission to call on me with her daughter the next day at four o'clock—a permission I joyfully granted—and Diana accompanied

me to the very foot of the steps. I kissed her smiling face, as I took leave, and gave my hand to her brother, who had come with us to help me in getting into the carriage.

XVII.

All the way from the Rue St. Dominique to the Rue de Rivoli I abandoned myself to the pleasant thoughts excited by the events of the day. For within a few hours I had successively experienced the inward sweetness of prayer, the charm of congenial society, and the pleasure of enthusiasm. A new life seemed to be infused into my heart, soul, and mind, which had grown frivolous in the atmosphere of the world, and I felt, as it were, entranced. Those who have felt themselves thus die and rise again to a new life will understand the feeling of joy I experienced. In all the blessings hitherto vouchsafed me, even in the love itself that had been, so to speak, the sun of my happiness, there had been one element wanting, without which everything seemed dark, unsatisfactory, wearisome, and depressing—an element which my soul had an imperious, irresistible, undeniable need of! Yes, I realized this, and while thus taking a clearer view of my state I also felt that this need was reasonable and just, and might be supplied without much difficulty. Was not Lorenzo gifted with a noble nature, and capable of the highest things? Had he not chosen me, and loved me to such a degree as to make me an object of idolatry? Well, I would point out to him the loftier heights he ought to attain. I, in my turn, would open to him a new world! . . .

Such were the thoughts, aspira-

tions, and dreams my heart was filled with on my way home. As I approached the Rue de Rivoli, however, I began to feel uneasy at being out so much later than I had anticipated, lest Lorenzo should have returned and been anxious about my absence. I was pleased to learn, therefore, on descending from the carriage, that he had not yet come home, and I joyfully ascended the staircase, perfectly satisfied with the way in which I had spent the morning.

I took off my hat, smoothed my hair, and then proceeded to arrange the *salon* according to his taste and my own. I arranged the flowers, as well as the books and other things, and endeavored to give the room, though in a hotel, an appearance of comfort and elegance that would entice him to remain at home; for I had formed the project of trying to induce him to spend the evening with me. I seemed to have so many things to say to him, and longed to communicate all the impressions I had received! With this object in view I took a bold step, but one that was authorized by the intimacy that existed between us and the friends whose guests we were to have been that day—I sent them an excuse, not only for myself, but my husband, hoping to find means afterwards of overcoming his displeasure, should he manifest any.

Having made these arrangements, I was beginning to wonder at his

continued absence when a letter was brought me which served to divert my mind for a time from every other thought. It was a letter from Livia which I had been impatiently awaiting. We had corresponded regularly since our separation, and I had begun to be surprised at a silence of unusual length on her part. It was not dated at Messina, but at Naples, and I read the first page, which was in answer to the contents of my letter, without finding any explanation of this. Finally I came to what follows :

“I told you in my last letter that I had obtained my father’s consent, but on one condition—that he should have the choice of the monastery I must enter on leaving home. What difference did it make? As to this I was, and am, wholly indifferent. I should make the same vows everywhere, and in them all I should go to God by the same path. In them all I should be separated from the world and united to him alone. And this was all I sought. The convent my father chose is not in Sicily. It is a house known and venerated by every one in Naples. I shall be received on the second of September. Meanwhile, I have come here under Ottavia’s escort, and am staying with our aunt, Donna Clelia, who has established herself here for the winter with her daughters. So everything is arranged, Gina. The future seems plain. I see distinctly before me my life and death, my joys and sorrows, my labors and my duty. I am done with all that is called happiness in the world, as well as with its misfortunes, its trials, its conflicting troubles, its numberless disappointments, and its poignant woes.

Therefore I cannot make use of the word *sacrifice*. It wounds me when I hear it used, for I blush at the little I have to give up in view of the immensity I am to receive! Yes; I blush when I remember it was suffering and humiliation that first made me raise my eyes to Him whom alone we *should* love, and whom alone I now feel I *can* love. If I had not been wholly sure of this, I should never have been so bold as to aspire to the union that awaits me—the only one here below in which the Bridegroom can satisfy the boundless affection of the heart that gives itself to him! . . .

“But to return to you, my dear Gina. Are you as happy as I desire you to be, and as you deserve to be? Your last letter was sad; and the calmer and better satisfied I feel about my own lot, the more I think of yours. Whatever happens, my dearest sister, do not forget that we both have but one goal. Your way is longer and more perilous than mine, but the great aim of us both should be to really love God above all things, and, *in him* and for him, to cherish all the objects of our affection. Yes, even those whom we prefer to all other creatures on earth. I am not using the language of a religious, but simply that of truth and common sense. If this letter reaches you on your return from some gay scene, at a time when you will not feel able to enter into its meaning, you must lay it aside. But if you read it when your mind is calm, and you are at leisure to listen to your inner self, you will understand what your Livia means by writing you in this way. Whatever happens, whether we are near each other or are widely separated, we shall always

be united in heart, my dear sister. The convent grates will not separate me from you. Death itself cannot divide us. One thing, and one alone, in the visible or invisible world, can raise a barrier between us and really separate us. And rather than behold this barrier rise, I would, as I have already told you, my beloved sister, rather see you dead. Gina, I love you as tenderly as any one ever loved another. I will pray for you on the second of September (Sunday). Probably when you read this I shall already have left the world. But I shall not have left you, dear sister. I shall be nearer you than when distance alone separated us. Besides, I am at Naples, to which you will soon return, and you will find that the grates will neither hide my face, nor my thoughts, nor my heart, nor my soul from you. . . .

"Gina, let me once more repeat that there is only one way of attaining real happiness—there is only one object worthy of our love. Let me beseech you not to desire any other passionately. But, no; you would not understand me; you would not believe me now. . . ."

Everything added to the effect of this letter—its date, and the day, the hour, and the moment in which it was received. The deed my sister had accomplished that very day had brought us nearer together, as she said. Had not a breath of the purer air she breathed reached me already and preserved me through the day from the aimless frivolity of my usual life?

"Happiness," it has been said, "is Christian; pleasure is not." Had I not profoundly realized the force of this saying for one day? Had I not experienced a happiness as different as possible from the

pleasure I enjoyed in the world? And did I not feel desirous this very instant of attaining the one at the expense of the other, and not only of taking a different view of life myself, but of imparting this desire to

*"Him whone'er from me shall separate."**

The day was beginning to decline, and I gradually sank into a short, profound slumber such as is usually attended by confused dreams. In mine most of those who had occupied my thoughts during the day passed successively before me—Livia first, covered with a long white veil, and next to her was the pleasant, smiling face of Diana. . . . Then I was once more at the Hôtel de Kergy, listening again to some parts of Gilbert's address. But when I was on the point of calling Lorenzo to hear him also, it no longer seemed to be Gilbert, but Lorenzo himself, on the platform, repeating the same words with an air of mockery, and gazing at me, in return, with the penetrating look so peculiar to him. . . . Then everything changed, and I found myself at twilight at the fork of a road in the country, and, while I was hesitating which path to take, I saw Gilbert beside me. He was familiar with the way, he said, and offered to be my guide; but I repulsed his arm, and made a violent effort to overtake Lorenzo, whom I suddenly perceived at a distance on the other road. . . . Then Livia seemed to be beside me, and give me her hand to help me along. Finally I saw Lorenzo just before me again, but he did not look like the same person; he was poorly clad, and his face was pale and altered. I recognized him, however, and sprang forward to overtake him,

** Questi che mai da me non sia diviso.*

when I awoke breathless, and with the painful feeling of uneasiness that such sleep generally produces when terminated by such an awakening. . . .

My heart throbbed. . . . I found it difficult at first to recall what had occupied my mind before I fell asleep. I soon came to myself, however, and was able to account for the utter darkness that surrounded me. I hastened to ring the bell and, when a light was brought, I looked at the clock with a surprise that gave way to anxiety. At that instant I heard the bell that announced Lorenzo's return at last. I heard him enter the ante-chamber, and I ran to open the drawing-room door myself. But I stopped short. It was not Lorenzo; it was Landolfo Landini, and he was alone. I drew back with a terrified look without daring to ask a question. But he smiled, as he closed the door behind him, and, taking my hand, said: "Do not be alarmed, my dear cousin, I beg. Nothing in particular has happened to Lorenzo—nothing, at least, which you are not prepared to hear after what occurred last night."

I breathed once more. . . . I know not what other fear crossed my mind, but I said with tolerable calmness:

"That means he has been playing again, or at least betting at the races, and has lost?"

"Yes, cousin, frightfully. There—I ought not to have told you, but I see no reason for concealing it from you; and as I have this opportunity of speaking privately to you, I will profit by it to give you another piece of advice more serious than any I have yet given you. Immediately make use of all the influence you still have over him to persuade him to leave Paris.

There is some fatality about this place, as far as he is concerned. He is more prudent everywhere else, and will become so here once more. The fever he has been seized with again must absolutely be broken up. The deuce!" continued he, "two or three more relapses like this would lead to consequences that would test all your courage, *ma belle duchesse*, and bring you, as well as him, to extremities you are ill fitted to bear. That is what I am most anxious about, you will allow me to say; for, without making you the shadow of a declaration, I find you so beautiful, so good, and so adorable that the mere thought of you some day. . . ."

"Keep to the point, Lando, if you please," said I with an impatient air. "Where is Lorenzo? Why did he not return with you, and why have you come to tell me what he would probably tell me himself?"

"Tell you himself? He will take care not to do that. I have already told you I am betraying his confidence, but it is for his good as well as yours. It is best for you to know that the sum he has lost today surpasses the resources he has on hand, and in order to make the necessary arrangements to pay at once the debt he has incurred, he is obliged to write to his agent at Naples or Sicily. He went directly to the club for this purpose, and commissioned me to tell you it was for nothing of importance, and beg you to attend the dinner-party without him, and present his excuses to your friends. He will join you in the evening."

Everything now seemed easily arranged according to my wishes, and of itself, as it were.

"That is very fortunate," said I eagerly, telling him of the excuse I

had sent for us both. "Therefore, Lando, go back to the club, I beg; or rather, I will write Lorenzo myself that he can arrange his affairs at his leisure, and return when he pleases to dine with me. I shall wait till he comes."

I hastily seized my pen to write him, but Lando resumed:

"Oh! as to that, cousin, you will only waste your trouble; for seeing how late it was, and that he could not possibly be here in season to accompany you, he accepted an invitation to dine with an acquaintance of his (and yours also, I suppose) whom he met at the races to-day."

"An acquaintance of his? . . ." I repeated, my heart filling with a keen anguish that made me turn pale without knowing why.

Lando perceived it. "Do not be alarmed," said he, smiling. "It is not Mnne. de B—, though she was at the races also, and made a fruitless effort to divert Lorenzo's mind from what was going on. Really, in your place," continued he with his usual levity, "I should regret she did not succeed. That would have been much better than . . . Come, . . . do not frown. I

am joking. To be serious, Lorenzo is not going to dine with her to-day, but with a lady from Milan who has just arrived, and whom you doubtless know. It is Donna Faustina Reali, the Marquise de Villanera! . . ."

Faustina Reali! . . . This name seemed to justify the strange presentiment I had just had, and I was tempted to exclaim with Hamlet,

"O my prophetic soul!"

thou hast not deceived me! . . . I had at that moment a sudden intuition of the past, the present, and the future. I saw clearly before me a life in which I should no longer be able to influence Lorenzo, or even to guide myself! . . .

I controlled my agitation, however, by a powerful effort, and Lando soon left me, renewing his first injunctions, and persuaded he had fully reassured me on other points. I gave him my hand with a smile as he left the room, and as soon as I found myself alone I covered my face with my hands, and exclaimed:

"O my dreams! my pleasant dreams! Where have they vanished?"

XVIII.

Faustina Reali! . . . That was the never-to-be-forgotten name I had read on the card Lorenzo snatched so violently from my hands at Naples! I had never seen it again, never heard it pronounced, but I remembered only too well the expression of my husband's face when he saw it, and the way in which he tore up the card on which it was written! . . .

I endeavored to lead the conversation at another time back to this circumstance, but at once desisted,

frightened at the manner in which he imposed silence on me, and a certain impression of both mystery and danger remained associated with the name.

As soon as I became calmer, however, I acknowledged that I really knew nothing, absolutely nothing, to cause the violent emotion I had just experienced. It had an imaginary cause, then, and might simply be owing to my mind, so recently lost in vague dreams, and perhaps a little too high-flown, be-

ing suddenly recalled to a painful and unpleasant, as well as very commonplace reality. I had imagined I was going to transform, as by the stroke of a wand, my husband's habits, tastes, occupations—nay, his entire life—but was brought to my senses by learning he had just lost an enormous sum at the races, and his mind, for the moment, was absorbed in the necessary complications for paying the debt. I had planned spending several hours alone with him that evening, during which, away from the bustle of the world, I would give him a minute account of my recent impressions, and tell him of all the wishes, projects, and ardent desires of which he was the object. I would rouse a nobler pride in his soul, and appeal to a thousand sentiments that were dormant, but not extinct; and I believe I expected to see them awakened at the mere sound of my voice! . . . Instead of this, . . . I was alone, and he was with another. . . . And what other? . . . Who was this Faustina, whose name had so suddenly appeared in my life, and who, at the very hour when I was aiming at so pure and elevated an influence over him, came thus, like an evil genius, to thrust herself between us? . . . I reminded myself in vain that Lorenzo had no idea of the plans I had, unbeknown to him, formed for the evening, but supposed me at this very moment to be with my friends, where he had promised to join me; but nothing could calm the sudden agitation of my heart, nothing could check the flood of thoughts that sprang from my anxiety, jealousy, and misconceptions, and my excitement became more intense in proportion to the lateness of the hour. Would he never come? . . .

And what would he say when he should arrive? . . . I was sure he would try to conceal his interview with Donna Faustina, and perhaps I ought to hide my knowledge of that as well as everything else, and feign ignorance of all that had occurred, in order not to betray Lando's indiscretion. . . . But what should I do when his eyes, so accustomed to interpret every expression of my face, should be fastened on me? How could I practise any dissimulation with him? It was not, indeed, my place to do anything of the kind. I had no cause to blush or be intimidated. And should he discover, after all, that I was not deceived, so much the better; and should he be displeased, so much the worse for Lando.

I had arrived at this point in my reflections when I heard the bell ringing loudly in the next room. Then there was a quick step, which this time was really his, and Lorenzo entered the room. He was pale and appeared excited, but said in a sufficiently calm tone:

"I have just come from M——'s, where I supposed I should find you; but I learned that, in sending my apology, you also excused yourself, and I did not remain an instant. What is the matter, Ginevra? . . . Are you ill? . . . Why did you not go? Why did you remain at home alone in this way?"

His expression was singular. It was at once affectionate and troubled. He looked earnestly at me, as he gave me his hand, and put back my hair in order to see my face more distinctly.

My cheeks were burning. The traces of the tears I had shed were visible, and, with his scrutinizing eyes upon me, I felt it hardly possible to restrain those that still

Tears came into my eyes, and my heart ached with the strongest feeling of grief I had ever experienced! . . .

O my God! . . . I must have had some love for thee, even at that time, since the very thought of any one's not loving thee caused me so much pain! . . .

Lorenzo's tone, look, and whole manner not only showed his utter indifference, but the complete incredulity he felt. I had never suspected it before, because it was something foreign to my experience. I knew it was possible to violate the law of God, but did not know it could be denied. I understood lukewarmness and negligence, for I had seen both in others as well as in him; but I had never before encountered lack of repentance and ignorance of duty. This cold denial of any love for God and of all belief in him Lorenzo, of course, had not expressly declared, but it had been betrayed by his manner doubtless even more than he would have wished. With all the inconsistencies of my character and the faults of my age, he must have seen that I had too lively and profound a faith not to be displeased at anything that jarred on it, and heretofore he had been circumspect without being hypocritical.

He saw the effect he had produced, and, as he had not become indifferent to me, he regretted it; but he knew he could not at once repair his mistake, and contented himself for the moment by trying to divert my mind from it by a change of subject. And I likewise felt it would be better to talk of something else. This prudence was by no means natural to my disposition, but I began to understand his. Besides, his injunc-

tions of the evening before were still too recent to be forgotten.

The conversation did not last long, for Lando, punctual to his engagement, arrived at half-past twelve with a beaming face, a flower in his button-hole, and in his hand an enormous bunch of violets destined for me.

"What!" he exclaimed when he learned my intentions for the afternoon. . . . "But that is impossible! Not go to the races? Why, you must. Remain at home when the weather is the finest in the world? I never heard of such a thing. . . . Deprive me of the pleasure of taking you in my *carrache*, and making everybody envy me? . . . That is the most cruel caprice that ever entered a woman's head! . . ."

Here Lorenzo left the room an instant to look for his hat, and Lando suddenly began in another tone: "I am in earnest, cousin. You would do much better to go."

What did he mean? I remained doubtful and troubled, but Lorenzo immediately returned, and I had no time for reflection. As they were leaving the room, my husband approached, and, taking me by the hand, looked at me with an expression his eyes now and then assumed, and which always dispersed, as by some enchantment, the clouds that rose too often between us. He slightly caressed my cheek with the glove in his hand, and whispered with a smile:

"Come, Ginevra mia, do not be angry. Let me see you smile again."

Then turning towards Lando, "It is not yet one o'clock," he said. "Let us start, and, before going to the Bois de Boulogne, we will stop at the Madeleine."

His looks, as well as his words, allayed my anxiety; but a thousand different ideas crossed my mind, and after they were gone I remained thoughtfully leaning on the balustrade of my balcony, where I followed them with my eyes to the end of the street, wondering what Lando meant, and if I had really done wrong not to accompany them.

The weather at that time was fine. The clearness of the sky, as well as the verdure of the trees, attracted my attention more than the aspect of the street, and of the garden already filled with the crowd of animated, happy, and gayly-dressed people, that give every pleasant summer day at Paris the appearance of a festival. But I was absorbed in my own thoughts, and looked at it all without noticing anything. I had a vague feeling that, among the dangers that seemed to encompass me in the new life into which I had been thrown, there were two I had special reason to dread. The first—the greatest—would have broken my heart, and on that I could not dwell for an instant. . . . The second threatened the loss of our property, and would diminish our income, if not absolutely ruin us. This, too, was alarming, but much less so than the other in my eyes, though just the contrary in Lando's estimation, if I read him aright. After considerable reflection, I concluded that he merely referred to something of the same nature he had alluded to the evening before, and I put it aside to ask myself with far deeper anxiety if I had really had a glimpse of Lorenzo's heart, as he looked at me on leaving the room, or whether he was playing a part, and deliberately deceiving me. The heavenly expression that some-

times beamed from his eyes always inspired me with a confidence in him that was equal to my affection. I had just experienced its effect. The look, however, was so transient that it rather resembled the reflection of a distant light than any actual, real feeling. Whereas his mocking laugh and the tone that to-day for the first time accompanied it were—alas! I could not doubt it—the expression of his real sentiments, and this contradiction terrified me. . . . He seemed to possess two natures, and my head grew weary in trying to decide which of the two was his real one—a question I frequently had occasion to ask afterwards, and to wait a long time for the reply—as doubtful to him then as it was to myself. . . .

I left the window, and, buried in an arm-chair, I allowed the time to pass away in reflections of this kind without opening the book I held in my hand, or noticing the gradual obscurity of the sky, that a short time before had been so clear. It was not threatening enough, however, to hinder me from going on foot to Vespers, which it was nearly time for, the hour not being as late at S. Roch's as elsewhere. I started without any delay, giving orders for my carriage to be at the church door at the end of the service.

The salutary impressions of the morning and the excessive anxiety and sadness that I afterwards experienced had somewhat counteracted the more or less unhealthy influences that result from a continued life of pleasure. I was now in that frame of mind when it is easy to collect one's thoughts; when the soul, so to speak, flies to the first place of refuge in which it is sure of repose. . . . Who has

not experienced the strange, mysterious, refreshing influence of prayer, even when mute and inarticulate? . . . Who has not, in this way, laid down for an instant all his sorrows, all his fears, all his sufferings, and afterwards taken up the load again with a renewed strength that seemed to have lightened the burden? . . .

I had suffered but little at that time in comparison with what life still had in reserve for me. But after a while we learn to suffer, and in this science, as in all others, it is the beginning one always finds the most difficult. A fearful storm, it is true, had assailed the first flower of my spring-time, and spread darkness and gloom over the heavens of my sixteenth year; but spring-time and the sun returned, and at an age when others only begin life I was commencing mine the second time. But this new life of happiness was, I now felt, threatened in a thousand ways. Apprehension, a worse torture than sadness; a vague, undefined fear, more difficult to endure than the woes it anticipates; the uncertainty, doubt, and suspicion, so much more intolerable to one of my nature than any positive suffering, rendered my heart heavy and depressed, and I felt it would be a relief to weep as well as to pray.

I knelt on the only vacant chair in the church, and remained a long time motionless, my face buried in my hands, unable to give utterance to my wants, but knowing God could read my heart, as, when we meet a friend after a long separation, we are often silent merely because we have so much to communicate, and know not where to begin. In this attitude I heard Vespers sung for the first time in my life, this office of the church

being, as is well known, much less frequently used in the south of Italy than in other places. I have already mentioned the public religious observances of my childhood. I had, therefore, never heard Vespers chanted in this way. The voices of the choristers were harmonious, and the responses were no less so. A large number of the congregation joined in the chant. There was something monotonous rather than musical in it, but it was more musical than reading, and it produced a strangely soothing influence on me. I laid aside all thought of myself, and attentively followed the admirable lines of the Psalmist; and when the Magnificat was intoned, I rose with the whole congregation to chant this divine hymn with a sensation of joy and hope that, for the moment, made me forget the painful impressions I felt when I entered beneath these arches now resounding with its words. . . .

Benediction followed, recalling the earliest, dearest remembrances of my childhood, and increasing the emotion I already felt. When the monstrance containing the divine Host was placed above the altar, I lost all thought of where I was. I forgot whether it was Paris, Rome, or Messina, and whether the arches above me were those of some magnificent church, or some humble chapel, or a mere oratory like that in which I had prayed from my childhood. What difference did it make? The sunshines everywhere alike, and diffuses equal light in all places. How much more truly shines throughout the whole Catholic world the living, uncreated Light, present on all our altars! Time and place were forgotten. I was once more with my beloved mother, once more with Livia, my

sweet, saintly sister, and the faithful Ottavia; and when, at the end of one of those hymns that are usually sung before the Blessed Sacrament, a young voice, pure and clear, uttered the word

Patria, it seemed at that moment to have a double meaning, and designate, not only my earthly, but my heavenly country.*

* In the *O Salutaris Hostia!*

XVI.

As soon as I rose from my place I perceived the young lady who had been collecting money in the morning not far off. She was going by with her mother without observing me, and I followed in the crowd that was making its way to the door. But a pouring rain was falling from the clouds which were so threatening two hours before, and a great many who were going out suddenly stopped and came back to remain under shelter during the shower. In consequence of this I all at once found myself beside the young lady, who was diligently seeking her mother, from whom she had been separated by the crowd. She observed me this time, and with a child-like smile and a tone of mingled terror and confidence that were equally touching, said :

"Excuse me, madame, but, as you are taller than I, please tell me if you see my mother—a lady in black with a gray hat."

"Yes," I replied, "I see her, and she is looking for you also. I will aid you in reaching her."

We had some trouble in opening a passage, but after some time succeeded in getting to the place where her mother had been pushed by the crowd at some distance from the door of the church. She was looking anxiously in every direction, and when she saw us her face lighted up, and she thanked me with equal simplicity and grace

of manner for the service I had rendered her daughter. We conversed together for some minutes, during which I learned that though I had met them twice that day in the same church, it was not the one they usually attended, their home being in another quarter of the city. The daughter had been invited to collect money at S. Roch's that day, and wishing, for some reason, to be at home by four o'clock, they had returned for the afternoon service, which ends an hour earlier there than anywhere else. This variation from their usual custom had probably caused a misunderstanding about the carriage which should have been at the door, and they felt embarrassed about getting to the Rue St. Dominique, where they resided, as the violent rain prevented them from going on foot. Glad to be able to extricate them from their embarrassment, I at once offered to take them home in my carriage, which was at the door. They accepted the offer with gratitude. Their manners and language would have left no doubt as to their rank, even if I had not met them in society. And I soon learned more than enough to satisfy me on this point.

As soon as we were seated in the carriage the elder of the two ladies said: "I know whom I have to thank for the favor you have done me, madame, for no one can forget

the Duchessa di Valenzano who has ever seen her, even but once, and no one can be ignorant of her name, which is in every mouth. But it is not the same with us. Allow me, therefore, to say that I am the Comtesse de Kergy, and this is my daughter Diana, . . . who is very happy, I assure you, as well as surprised, at the accident that has brought her in contact with one she has talked incessantly about ever since she had the happiness of seeing you first."

Her daughter blushed at these words, but did not turn away her eyes, which were fastened on me with a sympathetic expression of charming *naïveté* that inspired an irresistible attraction towards her in return. The name of Kergy was a well-known one. I had heard it more than once, and was trying to recall when and where I heard it for the first time, when, as we were crossing the Place du Carrousel, the young Diana, looking at the clock on the Tuileries, suddenly exclaimed :

"It is just going to strike four. We ought to feel greatly obliged to madame, mamma for, had it not been for her, we should have been extremely late, and Gilbert would have been surprised and anxious at our not arriving punctually."

Gilbert! . . . This name refreshed my memory. Gilbert de Kergy was the name of the young traveller whom I had once seen at the large dinner-party. He must be the very person in question. . . . Before I had time to ask, Mme. de Kergy put an end to my uncertainty on the subject.

"My son," said she, "has recently made an interesting tour in the Southern States of America, and it is with respect to this journey there is to be a discussion to-day which

we promised to attend. I have given up my large *salon* for the purpose, on condition (a condition Dinia proposed) that the meeting should end with a small collection in behalf of the orphan asylum for which she was soliciting contributions this morning—a work in which she is greatly interested."

"My husband, who has also travelled a great deal," I replied, "had, I believe, the pleasure of meeting M. de Kergy on one occasion, and conversing with him."

"Gilbert has not forgotten the conversation," exclaimed the young Diana with animation. "He often speaks of it. He told us about you also, madame, and described you so accurately that I knew you at once as soon as I saw you, before any one told me your name."

I made no reply, and we remained silent till, having crossed the bridge, we approached the Rue St. Dominique, when Diana, suddenly leaning towards her mother, whispered a few words in her ear. Mme. de Kergy began to laugh.

"Really," said she, "this child takes everything for granted; but you are so kind, I will allow her to repeat aloud what she has just said to me."

"Well," said the young girl, "I said the discussion would certainly be interesting, for Gilbert is to take a part in it, as well as several other good speakers, and those who attend will at the close aid in a good work. I added that I should be very much pleased, madame, if you would attend."

I was by no means prepared for this invitation, and at first did not know what reply to make, but quickly bethought myself that there would be more than an hour before Lorenzo's return. I knew, moreover, that, even according to his ideas, I should

be in very good society, and it could not displease him in the least if I attended a discussion at the Hôtel de Kergy under the auspices of the countess and her daughter. Besides, on my part, I felt a good deal of curiosity, never having attended anything like a public discussion. In short, I decided, without much hesitation, to accept the invitation, and the young Diana clapped her hands with joy. We were just entering the open *porte-cochère* of a large court, where we found quite a number of equipages and footmen. The carriage stopped before the steps and in five minutes I was seated between Diana and her mother near a platform at one end of a drawing-room large enough to contain one hundred and fifty or two hundred persons.

I cannot now give a particular account of this meeting, though it was an event in my life. The principal subject discussed was, I think, the condition of the blacks, not yet emancipated, in the Southern States of America. An American of the North, who could express himself very readily in French, first spoke, and after him a missionary priest, who considered the question from a no less elevated point of view, though quite different from that of the philanthropist, and the discussion had already grown quite animated before it became Gilbert de Kergy's turn to speak. When he rose, there was a movement in the whole assembly, and his first words excited involuntary attention, which soon grew to intense interest, and for the first time in my life I felt the power of language and the effect that eloquence can produce.

It was strange, but he began with a brief, brilliant sketch of places that seemed familiar to me; for Lo-

renzo had visited them, and he had such an aptness for description that I felt as if I had seen them in his company. My first thought was to regret his absence. Why was he not here with me now to listen to this discussion, to become interested in it, and perhaps take a part in it? . . . I had a vague feeling that this reunion was of a nature to render him as he appeared to me during the first days of our wedded life, when his extensive travels and noble traits made me admire his courage and recognize his genius, the prestige of which was only surpassed in my eyes by that of his tenderness! . . . But another motive intensified this desire and regret. The boldness, the intelligence, and the adventurous spirit of the young traveller were, of course, traits familiar to me, and which I was happy and proud to recognize; but, alas! the resemblance ceased when, quitting the field of observation and descriptions of nature, and all that memory and intelligence can glean, the orator soared to loftier regions, and linked these facts themselves with questions of a higher nature and wider scope than those of mere earthly interest. He did this with simplicity, earnestness, and consummate ability, and while he was speaking I felt that my mind rose without difficulty to the level of his, and expanded suddenly as if it had wings! It was a moment of keen enjoyment, but likewise of keen suffering; for I felt the difference that the greater or less elevation of the soul can produce in two minds that are equally gifted! I clearly saw what was wanting in Lorenzo's. I recognized the cause of the something lacking which had so often troubled me, and I felt more intensely and profoundly pained than I had that very morning.

While listening to Gilbert I only thought of Lorenzo, and, if I reluctantly acknowledged the superiority of the former, I felt at the same time that there was nothing to prevent the latter from becoming his equal; for, I again said to myself, Lorenzo was not merely a man of the world, leading a frivolous, aimless life, as might seem from his present habits. Love of labor and love of nature and art do not characterize such a man, and he possessed these traits in a high degree. He had therefore to be merely detached from other influences. This was my task, my duty, and it should also be my happiness; for I had no positive love for the world, whose pleasures I knew so well. No, I did not love it. I loved what was higher and better than that. I felt an immense void within that great things alone could fill. And I seemed to-day to have entered into the sphere of these great things; but I was there alone, and this was torture. All my actual impressions were therefore centred in an ardent desire to put an end to this solitude by drawing into that higher region him from whom I was at the moment doubly separated.

This was assuredly a pure and legitimate desire, but I did not believe myself capable of obtaining its realization without difficulty, and sufficiently calculating the price I must pay for such a victory and the efforts by which it must often be merited. . . .

While these thoughts were succeeding each other in my mind I almost forgot to listen to the end of the discourse, which terminated the meeting in the midst of the applause of the entire audience. The vast hall of discussion was instantly changed into a *salon* again, where everybody seemed to be acquaint-

ed, and where I found the *elite* of those I had met in other places. But assembled together for so legitimate an object, they at once inspired me with interest, respect, and a feeling of attraction. It was Paris under quite a new aspect, and it seemed to me, if I had lived in a world like this, I should never have experienced the terrible distress which I have spoken of, and which the various emotions of the day had alone succeeded in dissipating.

The charming young Diana, light and active, had ascended the platform, and was now talking to her brother. Gilbert started with surprise at her first words, and his eyes turned towards the place where I was standing. Then I almost instantly saw them descend from the platform and come towards me. Diana looked triumphant.

"This is my brother Gilbert, madame," said she, her eyes sparkling. "And it is I who have the honor of presenting him to you, as he seems to have waited for his little sister to do it."

He addressed me some words of salutation, to which I responded. As he stood near me, I again observed his calm, thoughtful, intelligent face, which had struck me so much the only time I remembered to have seen him before. While speaking a few moments previous his face was animated, and his eyes flashed with a fire that added more than once to the effect of his clear, penetrating voice, which was always well modulated. His gestures also, though not numerous or studied, had a natural grace and the dignity which strength of conviction, joined to brilliant eloquence, gives to the entire form of an orator. His manner was now so simple that I felt perfectly at ease with him, and told him without any hesitation how

happy I was at the double good-fortune that had brought me in contact with his sister, and had resulted in my coming to this meeting where I had been permitted to hear him speak.

"This day will be a memorable one for me as well as for her, madame," he replied, "and I shall never forget it."

There was not the least inflection in his voice to make me regard his words as anything more than mere politeness, but their evident sincerity caused me a momentary embarrassment. He seemed to attach too much importance to this meeting, but it passed away. He inspired me with almost as much confidence as if he had been a friend. I compared him with Landolfo, and wondered what effect so different an influence would have on Lorenzo, and I could not help wishing he were his friend also. . . .

I continued silent, and he soon resumed: "The Duca di Valenzano is not here?"

"No; he will be sorry, and I regret it for his sake."

"The presence of such a traveler would have been a great honor to us."

"He was very happy to have an opportunity of conversing with you on one occasion."

"It was a conversation I have never forgotten. It would have been for my advantage to renew it, but I never go into society—at Paris."

"And elsewhere?"

"Elsewhere it is a different thing," said he, smiling. "I am asocial while travelling as I am uncivilized at my return."

"We must not expect, then, to meet you again in Paris; but if you ever go to Italy, may we not hope you will come to see us?"

"If you will allow me to do so," said he eagerly.

"Yes, certainly. I think I can promise that the well-known hospitality of the Neapolitans will not be wanting towards the Comte Gilbert de Kergy."

After a moment's silence he resumed: "You must have been absent when I was at Naples. That was two years ago."

"I was not married then, and I am not a Neapolitan."

"And not an Italian, perhaps."

"Do you say so on account of the color of my hair? That would be astonishing on the part of so observant a traveller, for you must have noticed that our great masters had almost as many blondes as brunettes for their models. However, I am neither English nor German, as perhaps you are tempted to think. I am a Sicilian."

"I have never seen in Sicily or anywhere else a person who resembled you."

These words implied a compliment, and probably such an one as I had never received; and, I need not repeat, I was not fond of compliments. But this was said without the least smile or the slightest look that indicated any desire to flatter or please me. Was not this a more subtle flattery than I had been accustomed to receive? . . . And did it not awaken unawares the vanity I had long thought rooted out of the bottom of my heart? I can affirm nothing positive as to this, for there is always something lacking in the knowledge of one's self, however thoroughly we may think we have acquired it. But I am certain it never occurred to me at the time to analyze the effect of this meeting on me. I was wholly absorbed in the regret and hope it awakened.

As I was on the point of leaving, Mme. de Kergy asked permission to call on me with her daughter the next day at four o'clock—a permission I joyfully granted—and Diana accompanied

me to the very foot of the steps. I kissed her smiling face, as I took leave, and gave my hand to her brother, who had come with us to help me in getting into the carriage.

XVII.

All the way from the Rue St. Dominique to the Rue de Rivoli I abandoned myself to the pleasant thoughts excited by the events of the day. For within a few hours I had successively experienced the inward sweetness of prayer, the charm of congenial society, and the pleasure of enthusiasm. A new life seemed to be infused into my heart, soul, and mind, which had grown frivolous in the atmosphere of the world, and I felt, as it were, entranced. Those who have felt themselves thus die and rise again to a new life will understand the feeling of joy I experienced. In all the blessings hitherto vouchsafed me, even in the love itself that had been, so to speak, the sun of my happiness, there had been one element wanting, without which everything seemed dark, unsatisfactory, wearisome, and depressing—an element which my soul had an imperious, irresistible, undeniable need of! Yes, I realized this, and while thus taking a clearer view of my state I also felt that this need was reasonable and just, and might be supplied without much difficulty. Was not Lorenzo gifted with a noble nature, and capable of the highest things? Had he not chosen me, and loved me to such a degree as to make me an object of idolatry? Well, I would point out to him the loftier heights he ought to attain. I, in my turn, would open to him a new world! . . .

Such were the thoughts, aspira-

tions, and dreams my heart was filled with on my way home. As I approached the Rue de Rivoli, however, I began to feel uneasy at being out so much later than I had anticipated, lest Lorenzo should have returned and been anxious about my absence. I was pleased to learn, therefore, on descending from the carriage, that he had not yet come home, and I joyfully ascended the staircase, perfectly satisfied with the way in which I had spent the morning.

I took off my hat, smoothed my hair, and then proceeded to arrange the *salon* according to his taste and my own. I arranged the flowers, as well as the books and other things, and endeavored to give the room, though in a hotel, an appearance of comfort and elegance that would entice him to remain at home; for I had formed the project of trying to induce him to spend the evening with me. I seemed to have so many things to say to him, and longed to communicate all the impressions I had received! With this object in view I took a bold step, but one that was authorized by the intimacy that existed between us and the friends whose guests we were to have been that day—I sent them an excuse, not only for myself, but my husband, hoping to find means afterwards of overcoming his displeasure, should he manifest any.

Having made these arrangements, I was beginning to wonder at his

continued absence when a letter was brought me which served to divert my mind for a time from every other thought. It was a letter from Livia which I had been impatiently awaiting. We had corresponded regularly since our separation, and I had begun to be surprised at a silence of unusual length on her part. It was not dated at Messina, but at Naples, and I read the first page, which was in answer to the contents of my letter, without finding any explanation of this. Finally I came to what follows :

“I told you in my last letter that I had obtained my father’s consent, but on one condition—that he should have the choice of the monastery I must enter on leaving home. What difference did it make? As to this I was, and am, wholly indifferent. I should make the same vows everywhere, and in them all I should go to God by the same path. In them all I should be separated from the world and united to him alone. And this was all I sought. The convent my father chose is not in Sicily. It is a house known and venerated by every one in Naples. I shall be received on the second of September. Meanwhile, I have come here under Ottavia’s escort, and am staying with our aunt, Donna Clelia, who has established herself here for the winter with her daughters. So everything is arranged, Gina. The future seems plain. I see distinctly before me my life and death, my joys and sorrows, my labors and my duty. I am done with all that is called happiness in the world, as well as with its misfortunes, its trials, its conflicting troubles, its numberless disappointments, and its poignant woes.

Therefore I cannot make use of the word *sacrifice*. It wounds me when I hear it used, for I blush at the little I have to give up in view of the immensity I am to receive! Yes; I blush when I remember it was suffering and humiliation that first made me raise my eyes to Him whom alone we *should* love, and whom alone I now feel I *can* love. If I had not been wholly sure of this, I should never have been so bold as to aspire to the union that awaits me—the only one here below in which the Bridegroom can satisfy the boundless affection of the heart that gives itself to him! . . .

“But to return to you, my dear Gina. Are you as happy as I desire you to be, and as you deserve to be? Your last letter was sad; and the calmer and better satisfied I feel about my own lot, the more I think of yours. Whatever happens, my dearest sister, do not forget that we both have but one goal. Your way is longer and more perilous than mine, but the great aim of us both should be to really love God above all things, and, *in him* and for him, to cherish all the objects of our affection. Yes, even those whom we prefer to all other creatures on earth. I am not using the language of a religious, but simply that of truth and common sense. If this letter reaches you on your return from some gay scene, at a time when you will not feel able to enter into its meaning, you must lay it aside. But if you read it when your mind is calm, and you are at leisure to listen to your inner self, you will understand what your Livia means by writing you in this way. Whatever happens, whether we are near each other or are widely separated, we shall always

be united in heart, my dear sister. The convent grates will not separate me from you. Death itself cannot divide us. One thing, and one alone, in the visible or invisible world, can raise a barrier between us and really separate us. And rather than behold this barrier rise, I would, as I have already told you, my beloved sister, rather see you dead. Gina, I love you as tenderly as any one ever loved another. I will pray for you on the second of September (Sunday). Probably when you read this I shall already have left the world. But I shall not have left you, dear sister. I shall be nearer you than when distance alone separated us. Besides, I am at Naples, to which you will soon return, and you will find that the grates will neither hide my face, nor my thoughts, nor my heart, nor my soul from you. . . .

"Gina, let me once more repeat that there is only one way of attaining real happiness—there is only one object worthy of our love. Let me beseech you not to desire any other passionately. But, no; you would not understand me; you would not believe me now. . . ."

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Everything added to the effect of this letter—its date, and the day, the hour, and the moment in which it was received. The deed my sister had accomplished that very day had brought us nearer together, as she said. Had not a breath of the purer air she breathed reached me already and preserved me through the day from the aimless frivolity of my usual life?

"Happiness," it has been said, "is Christian; pleasure is not." Had I not profoundly realized the force of this saying for one day? Had I not experienced a happiness as different as possible from the

pleasure I enjoyed in the world? And did I not feel desirous this very instant of attaining the one at the expense of the other, and not only of taking a different view of life myself, but of imparting this desire to

*"Him whone'er from me shall separate."**

The day was beginning to decline, and I gradually sank into a short, profound slumber such as is usually attended by confused dreams. In mine most of those who had occupied my thoughts during the day passed successively before me—Livia first, covered with a long white veil, and next to her was the pleasant, smiling face of Diana. . . . Then I was once more at the Hôtel de Kergy, listening again to some parts of Gilbert's address. But when I was on the point of calling Lorenzo to hear him also, it no longer seemed to be Gilbert, but Lorenzo himself, on the platform, repeating the same words with an air of mockery, and gazing at me, in return, with the penetrating look so peculiar to him. . . . Then everything changed, and I found myself at twilight at the fork of a road in the country, and, while I was hesitating which path to take, I saw Gilbert beside me. He was familiar with the way, he said, and offered to be my guide; but I repulsed his arm, and made a violent effort to overtake Lorenzo, whom I suddenly perceived at a distance on the other road. . . . Then Livia seemed to be beside me, and give me her hand to help me along. Finally I saw Lorenzo just before me again, but he did not look like the same person; he was poorly clad, and his face was pale and altered. I recognized him, however, and sprang forward to overtake him,

** Questi che mai da me non sia diviso.*

when I awoke breathless, and with the painful feeling of uneasiness that such sleep generally produces when terminated by such an awakening. . . .

My heart throbbed. . . . I found it difficult at first to recall what had occupied my mind before I fell asleep. I soon came to myself, however, and was able to account for the utter darkness that surrounded me. I hastened to ring the bell and, when a light was brought, I looked at the clock with a surprise that gave way to anxiety. At that instant I heard the bell that announced Lorenzo's return at last. I heard him enter the ante-chamber, and I ran to open the drawing-room door myself. But I stopped short. It was not Lorenzo; it was Landolfo Landini, and he was alone. I drew back with a terrified look without daring to ask a question. But he smiled, as he closed the door behind him, and, taking my hand, said: "Do not be alarmed, my dear cousin, I beg. Nothing in particular has happened to Lorenzo—nothing, at least, which you are not prepared to hear after what occurred last night."

I breathed once more. . . . I know not what other fear crossed my mind, but I said with tolerable calmness:

"That means he has been playing again, or at least betting at the races, and has lost?"

"Yes, cousin, frightfully. There—I ought not to have told you, but I see no reason for concealing it from you; and as I have this opportunity of speaking privately to you, I will profit by it to give you another piece of advice more serious than any I have yet given you. Immediately make use of all the influence you still have over him to persuade him to leave Paris.

There is some fatality about this place, as far as he is concerned. He is more prudent everywhere else, and will become so here once more. The fever he has been seized with again must absolutely be broken up. The deuce!" continued he, "two or three more relapses like this would lead to consequences that would test all your courage, *ma belle duchesse*, and bring you, as well as him, to extremities you are ill fitted to bear. That is what I am most anxious about, you will allow me to say; for, without making you the shadow of a declaration, I find you so beautiful, so good, and so adorable that the mere thought of you some day. . . ."

"Keep to the point, Lando, if you please," said I with an impatient air. "Where is Lorenzo? Why did he not return with you, and why have you come to tell me what he would probably tell me himself?"

"Tell you himself? He will take care not to do that. I have already told you I am betraying his confidence, but it is for his good as well as yours. It is best for you to know that the sum he has lost today surpasses the resources he has on hand, and in order to make the necessary arrangements to pay at once the debt he has incurred, he is obliged to write to his agent at Naples or Sicily. He went directly to the club for this purpose, and commissioned me to tell you it was for nothing of importance, and beg you to attend the dinner-party without him, and present his excuses to your friends. He will join you in the evening."

Everything now seemed easily arranged according to my wishes, and of itself, as it were.

"That is very fortunate," said I eagerly, telling him of the excuse I

had sent for us both. "Therefore, Lando, go back to the club, I beg; or rather, I will write Lorenzo myself that he can arrange his affairs at his leisure, and return when he pleases to dine with me. I shall wait till he comes."

I hastily seized my pen to write him, but Lando resumed:

"Oh! as to that, cousin, you will only waste your trouble; for seeing how late it was, and that he could not possibly be here in season to accompany you, he accepted an invitation to dine with an acquaintance of his (and yours also, I suppose) whom he met at the races to-day."

"An acquaintance of his? . . ." I repeated, my heart filling with a keen anguish that made me turn pale without knowing why.

Lando perceived it. "Do not be alarmed," said he, smiling. "It is not Mme. de B—, though she was at the races also, and made a fruitless effort to divert Lorenzo's mind from what was going on. Really, in your place," continued he with his usual levity, "I should regret she did not succeed. That would have been much better than . . . Come, . . . do not frown. I

am joking. To be serious, Lorenzo is not going to dine with her to-day, but with a lady from Milan who has just arrived, and whom you doubtless know. It is Donna Faustina Reali, the Marquise de Villanera! . . ."

Faustina Reali! . . . This name seemed to justify the strange presentiment I had just had, and I was tempted to exclaim with Hamlet,

"O my prophetic soul!"

thou hast not deceived me! . . . I had at that moment a sudden intuition of the past, the present, and the future. I saw clearly before me a life in which I should no longer be able to influence Lorenzo, or even to guide myself! . . .

I controlled my agitation, however, by a powerful effort, and Lando soon left me, renewing his first injunctions, and persuaded he had fully reassured me on other points. I gave him my hand with a smile as he left the room, and as soon as I found myself alone I covered my face with my hands, and exclaimed:

"O my dreams! my pleasant dreams! Where have they vanished?"

XVIII.

Faustina Reali! . . . That was the never-to-be-forgotten name I had read on the card Lorenzo snatched so violently from my hands at Naples! I had never seen it again, never heard it pronounced, but I remembered only too well the expression of my husband's face when he saw it, and the way in which he tore up the card on which it was written! . . .

I endeavored to lead the conversation at another time back to this circumstance, but at once desisted,

frightened at the manner in which he imposed silence on me, and a certain impression of both mystery and danger remained associated with the name.

As soon as I became calmer, however, I acknowledged that I really knew nothing, absolutely nothing, to cause the violent emotion I had just experienced. It had an imaginary cause, then, and might simply be owing to my mind, so recently lost in vague dreams, and perhaps a little too high-flown, be-

ing suddenly recalled to a painful and unpleasant, as well as very commonplace reality. I had imagined I was going to transform, as by the stroke of a wand, my husband's habits, tastes, occupations—nay, his entire life—but was brought to my senses by learning he had just lost an enormous sum at the races, and his mind, for the moment, was absorbed in the necessary complications for paying the debt. I had planned spending several hours alone with him that evening, during which, away from the bustle of the world, I would give him a minute account of my recent impressions, and tell him of all the wishes, projects, and ardent desires of which he was the object. I would rouse a nobler pride in his soul, and appeal to a thousand sentiments that were dormant, but not extinct; and I believe I expected to see them awakened at the mere sound of my voice! . . . Instead of this, . . . I was alone, and he was with another. . . . And what other? . . . Who was this Faustina, whose name had so suddenly appeared in my life, and who, at the very hour when I was aiming at so pure and elevated an influence over him, came thus, like an evil genius, to thrust herself between us? . . . I reminded myself in vain that Lorenzo had no idea of the plans I had, unbeknown to him, formed for the evening, but supposed me at this very moment to be with my friends, where he had promised to join me; but nothing could calm the sudden agitation of my heart, nothing could check the flood of thoughts that sprang from my anxiety, jealousy, and misconceptions, and my excitement became more intense in proportion to the lateness of the hour. Would he never come? . . .

And what would he say when he should arrive? . . . I was sure he would try to conceal his interview with Donna Faustina, and perhaps I ought to hide my knowledge of that as well as everything else, and feign ignorance of all that had occurred, in order not to betray Lando's indiscretion. . . . But what should I do when his eyes, so accustomed to interpret every expression of my face, should be fastened on me? How could I practise any dissimulation with him? It was not, indeed, my place to do anything of the kind. I had no cause to blush or be intimidated. And should he discover, after all, that I was not deceived, so much the better; and should he be displeased, so much the worse for Lando.

I had arrived at this point in my reflections when I heard the bell ringing loudly in the next room. Then there was a quick step, which this time was really his, and Lorenzo entered the room. He was pale and appeared excited, but said in a sufficiently calm tone:

"I have just come from M——'s, where I supposed I should find you; but I learned that, in sending my apology, you also excused yourself, and I did not remain an instant. What is the matter, Ginevra? . . . Are you ill? . . . Why did you not go? Why did you remain at home alone in this way?"

His expression was singular. It was at once affectionate and troubled. He looked earnestly at me, as he gave me his hand, and put back my hair in order to see my face more distinctly.

My cheeks were burning. The traces of the tears I had shed were visible, and, with his scrutinizing eyes upon me, I felt it hardly possible to restrain those that still

filled my own. . . . He took my head between his two hands, and held it a moment against his breast in silence. The throbbing of his heart perhaps equalled that of mine. I was touched, speechless and disarmed, and less than ever in a condition to dissimulate anything, when he suddenly said:

"Why have you been crying, Ginevra? I must know."

Raising my still tearful eyes towards him, and looking confidently in his face, I replied: "I have been crying, Lorenzo, because I heard Donna Faustina is here, and that you had gone to see her."

He started, and, though accustomed to the variations of his mobile face, I was struck with the effect my words had produced. His face reddened, then turned paler than before, and for some moments he was incapable of making any reply, and even seemed to forget my proximity. He seated himself beside the table, and remained silent. I looked at him with amazement and anxiety. At length he said :

"Who has told you anything about Donna Faustina, and what do you know of her?"

"No one has told me anything about her, and all I know of her you have told me yourself by the very emotion you show at her name."

He was again silent for a moment, and then resumed in his usual tone, as if he had triumphed over all hesitation :

"Well, Ginevra, even if you had not known of her being in Paris, or had never heard of her name or existence, I had resolved to speak to you about her this very evening. Listen to me. It is not, after all, a long story."

He had perfectly recovered his

self-control, and yet he continued with some effort :

"It is not for you to be jealous of her, Ginevra. It is she who has reason to be jealous of you. She has done you no wrong; whereas, without suspecting it, you have done her a great and irreparable injury."

I opened my eyes with surprise.

"It is not necessary to tell you when and where I met her for the first time, but perhaps it is right I should acknowledge that I was inspired with a passion for her such as a man willingly imagines he can never feel but once in his life."

I could not repress a start.

"Wait, Ginevra; hear me to the end. She was married and virtuous. I left her, . . . but I had just learned she was free, and was about to go to see her when I was called to Sicily by the lawsuit on which my property depends. You know the rest. . . . The sight of you effaced the impressions of the past. I was still free—free from any promise that bound me to her, though perhaps she was expecting me to return to Milan. . . ."

"You forgot her, and offered me your hand? . . ." I exclaimed with mingled pity and almost reproach.

He replied with some emotion :

"Yes, Ginevra, and without any scruple; for after passing a month in your vicinity, I felt I loved her no longer, and *at that time* . . . I did not know she loved me."

His brow grew dark. He stopped an instant, and then rapidly continued :

"At a later day I ascertained, . . . I had reason to believe, . . . beyond a doubt, that the feeling she had succeeded in hiding from me existed really, profoundly, . . . and that she had suffered. . . .

Ginevra! in the intoxication of my new happiness I could not feel any regret, but I acknowledge I had a moment of remorse. Yes; I never wished to hear her name again, never to see her or hear anything that would recall her. . . . I was almost irritated at Naples at finding her card among those left on your arrival there. . . . I was angry with her, poor Faustina, when I should have been grateful as well as you."

"What do you mean?"

"It was at Naples, which she happened to be passing through, that the news of our marriage reached her. And when we arrived just after, she wished to show, by leaving her card, that she should henceforth only consider herself my friend and yours. But at that time I did not regard it in this way, and I was unjust as well as ungrateful."

"And now, Lorenzo?" I said with many commingled feelings I could not have defined.

"Now, Ginevra, I think she was generous, and it would be well for you to be so in your turn. She wishes to know you, and I come to ask you to receive her to-morrow. . . . You hesitate! . . . I do not suppose, however," said he a little loftily, as he frowned, "that you think me capable of making such a proposition to my wife, if the Marquise de Villanera had not a spotless reputation, and I were not certain that there is no reason why you should not grant her the favor I beg."

Lorenzo was perfectly sincere at the moment he uttered these words. But as I write the account of that day by the light of events that followed, I do not feel the same assurance I did at the time he was talking. All he then affirmed was

true; but he did not tell me everything. He did not, for instance, explain how he happened to learn, at a time when he had better have never known them, the sentiments that had hitherto been concealed from him. Still less did he tell me the effect this revelation produced on him. But with regard to this he doubtless did not deceive me any more than he did himself. Meanwhile, it was not possible to give more heed to a vague, inexplicable presentiment it would have been impossible to justify, than to what he said. I therefore consented, without any further hesitation, to the interview he proposed, and gave him my hand. He kissed it and held it lightly in his; then gave me a new proof of his confidence as well as unexpected satisfaction by the following words:

"This interview, Ginevra, will not commit you to any great extent at the most, as, for many reasons it would be useless to give you, I wish, if not too great a disappointment for you, to leave Paris—sooner than we intended. We will go in a week."

He saw the ray of joy that flashed from my eyes, and looked at me with an air of surprise. I was afraid of compromising poor Lando by betraying my knowledge of the danger that rendered this departure so opportune. I was also afraid he would regard it as a new proof of the jealous distrust he had just allayed, and hastened to speak of Livia's letter and my desire to return to Naples, where I had just learned I should find my sister. He accepted this explanation, and the day full of so many different causes of excitement ended more tranquilly than I had anticipated two hours before. It was difficult, however, when I once more found

myself alone, to collect my troubled thoughts. A confused crowd of new impressions had replaced those of the morning. The projects inspired by the lofty eloquence of Gilbert de Kergy all at once seemed chimerical. My hopes had fled beyond recall. And yet I

could not account for my apprehension. Anxiety, a vague anxiety, persistently prevailed over everything. I only succeeded in regaining my calmness at last by two considerations: we were to leave Paris, and it was Lorenzo himself who proposed our departure.

XIX.

The following day, for some reason or other I did not explain to myself, I gave unusual attention to my toilet. I generally read while my waiting-maid was arranging my hair according to her own fancy, but that day I turned more than once towards the mirror. I observed with pleasure the golden lustre of my hair in the morning sunlight, and suggested myself the addition of a bow of ribbon of the same color as my belt. After I was dressed I gave, before leaving my room, a scrutinizing look in a large glass where I could see myself from head to foot. It seemed to me I was becomingly attired, and I felt pleased.

My satisfaction was confirmed by an exclamation that escaped Lorenzo as soon as he caught sight of me. He was already seated at the breakfast-table, which stood at one end of the room.

"You are charming this morning, Ginevra!" said he, smiling. He then grew thoughtful. After remaining silent a few moments, he resumed, perhaps to divert my mind from another thought he supposed it occupied with:

"I was sorry to leave you alone so long yesterday. How did you while away the time during the long afternoon?"

If he had asked this question the evening before at the imaginary *tête-à-tête* I had planned, what a minute, animated account should I

have given him! How readily the thoughts which then occupied my mind would have sprung to my lips! He regarded me as a child, but I was no longer one; and beholding me all at once in the new aspect of an energetic, courageous woman, capable of aiding him with a firm hand in ascending to higher regions, he would have been surprised and touched; the passing gleam that sometimes manifested itself in his eyes would perhaps have been less transient this time, and I should have succeeded in kindling a flame of which this light was a mere emblem! . . . Lorenzo, if you had only been willing! If you had only listened to me then, entered into my feelings, and read my heart, what a life ours might have been! . . . Ah! happiness and goodness are more closely allied in this world than is usually supposed. If virtue sometimes does not escape misfortune, it is sure there is no happiness without it! But the impetus by which I hoped to attain my aim at a single bound had been suddenly checked, and I no longer remembered now what I longed to say the evening before, or the motive I then had in view. I therefore answered my husband's question with the utmost coolness without interrupting my breakfast:

"I went to S. Roch's. It rained in torrents, and, finding the Comtesse de Kergy and her daughter at

the door without any carriage, I took them home."

"I am glad you did. There is no family more respected, and Kergy is one of the most intelligent of travellers."

"Yes, so I should suppose. I have heard him speak of his travels. There was a meeting at the Hôtel de Kergy yesterday at four o'clock, which I was invited to attend, and he made an address."

"And spoke very ably, I have no doubt. I have heard him, and can judge."

"You have heard him?"

"Yes, a fortnight ago. . . . Though scarcely acquainted, we are the founders and chief supporters of a review devoted to art and scientific subjects, the acting committee of which summoned a meeting of its members to draw up some resolution, and at this meeting he spoke."

"He is very eloquent, is he not?"

"Very eloquent indeed, but, on the whole, visionary."

"Visionary?"

"Yes, visionary, and sometimes incomprehensible even. He soars to such vague heights that no one can follow him. But in spite of this, he is a fellow of great talent, and has a noble nature, I should think."

Lorenzo rose while speaking, and drew a memorandum-book from his pocket:

"I will write down the address of the Hôtel de Kergy, that I may not forget to leave my card."

"Mme. de Kergy and her daughter," said I, "are coming to see me to-day about four o'clock."

He was silent a moment, and then said:

"And till that time?"

"Till then," I replied, turning

red, "I shall be at home and alone."

"Very well," rejoined he, taking up a newspaper, while I silently went to a seat near the open window.

I compared the conversation which had just taken place with the one I imagined the evening before. I remembered the effect of the very name of her whose visit I was now expecting, and I felt inclined to both laugh and cry. In a word, I was nervous and agitated, and doubtless manifested my uneasiness and irritation more than I wished.

Lorenzo raised his eyes, and looked at me a moment.

"What are you thinking of, Ginevra?"

"Are you quite sure," said I abruptly, "that this Donna Faustina is not a *jettatrice*?"

He rose and somewhat impatiently threw his paper on the table. But quickly overcoming himself, he said calmly:

"Do you find any evidence in what I related last evening that she ever brought ill-luck to any one?"

"If it is not she," I exclaimed quickly, "I hope, at least, you do not think . . ."

I was about to add, "that it is I," but I stopped on seeing the cloud that came over his face.

"Come, Ginevra," said he, "you are really too childish! You are joking, doubtless, but no one knows better than you how to point a jest. But you shall tell me yourself what you think of the Marquise de Villanera after seeing her. As for me, I am going away. It is not necessary to have a third party when she comes. I will go meanwhile to see Kergy. But," added he, as he was leaving the room, "as you have consented to receive her, remember I depend on your doing so politely."

He went away, leaving me in a frame of mind by no means serene. I felt angry with him, and at the same time dissatisfied with myself. Everything went contrary to what I had hoped, and I awaited my visitor with a mixture of anguish and ill-humor.

I felt a kind of uneasiness analogous to that experienced when there is thunder in the air. I tried to apply myself to something, but, finding this impossible, I ended by returning to the window, where, book in hand, I rose from time to time to see what was going on in the street or the garden of the Tuileries.

At length, about two o'clock, I saw a small *coupé* coming around the corner from the Rue St. Florentin. I had seen an endless number pass while I stood there, but I watched this one without a shadow of doubt as to the direction it would take. It was but a moment, indeed, before I saw it stop at the door of the hotel. We were not, to be sure, the only occupants, but it never occurred to me that the person in the carriage would ask for any one but myself. I returned to the drawing-room, therefore, and had taken the seat I usually occupied when I received callers, when the Marquise de Villanera was announced in a loud voice.

I rose to meet her. There was a moment's silence, doubtless caused by an equal degree of curiosity on both sides. It was only for an instant that passed like a flash, but nevertheless each of us had scanned the other from head to foot.

At the first glance she did not seem young. I was not twenty years old myself then, and I judged as one is apt to at that age. In reality, she was not thirty. She was tall and fine-looking. Her form was noble and graceful, her features

delicate and regular, her hair and eyebrows black as jet, her complexion absolutely devoid of color, and her eyes of a lively blue. This somewhat too bright a color gave a cold, hard look to her eyes, but their expression changed as soon as she began to speak, and became sweet, caressing, beseeching, irresistible. She was dressed in black, apparently with extreme simplicity, but in reality with extreme care.

I had not time to wonder how I should break this silence. It was she who spoke first, and her very first words removed the timidity and embarrassment that rendered this interview still more painful. What she said I am really unable to remember, and I cannot comprehend now the effect of her words; but I know they wrought a complete transformation in the feelings I experienced the evening before at the very mention of her name!

Women often wonder in vain what the charm is by which other women succeed in pleasing, and, as Bossuet says, in "drawing after them captive souls." In their eyes, at least, this charm is inexplicable. But this is not always the case; for there are some women who, while they reserve for one the absolute ascendency of their empire, like to feel able to exert it over every one. Such was Donna Faustina. However deep the strange, secret warning of my heart might be, it was beyond my power to resist her. While she was talking I felt my prejudices vanish like snow before the sun, and it could not possibly have been otherwise, perhaps; at least without a penetration I was not endowed with, a distrust I was wholly incapable of, and an experience I did not then possess.

Did she really feel a kind of attraction towards me that rendered

her sincere at this first interview? I prefer to think so. Yes, I prefer not to believe that deceit and perfidy could disguise themselves to such a degree under an appearance of cordiality, simplicity, artlessness, and sincerity. I prefer to hope it was not wholly by consummate art she won my confidence while seeming to repose unlimited confidence in me.

She very soon learned all she wished concerning me, and in return gave me her whole history; and however singular this sudden frankness on the part of a stranger ought to have appeared to me—and, indeed, was—the grace of her manner and the charm of her language prevented any doubt or criticism from crossing my mind. Young, without position or fortune, she had married a man three times as old as herself, with whom she lived in strict retirement. Her meeting with Lorenzo (but how this happened she did not explain) had been the only ray of joy in her life. She did not hide from me either the grief his departure caused her or the extent of her disappointment when she vainly awaited his return after she was left free. But all these feelings, she said, belonged to the past. Nothing remained but a friendship which she could not give up. The death of the aged Marquis de Villanera had of course left her free again, but it had also taken away her only protector. She felt alone in the world now, and begged me, in the midst of my happiness, to consider her loneliness and take pity on her.

While thus speaking she fixed upon me her large, blue eyes bathed in tears. And as I listened to her, tears also streamed down my cheeks. I almost reproached myself for being happy. Lorenzo's inconstancy weighed on my heart like remorse, and all that was generous in my nature responded to her appeal. Consequently, before our interview was over I embraced her, calling her my dear Faustina, and she clasped me in her arms, calling me for the twentieth time "her lovely, darling Ginevra."

My *naïveté* may seem astonishing. I was, indeed, *naïve* at that time, and it would have been surprising had I not been. People of more penetration than I would have been blinded. Lorenzo himself was at that time. When he found us together at his return, and comprehended the result of our interview from the very first words he heard, he turned towards me with eyes lit up with tenderness and gratitude.

His first, and probably his only, feeling at meeting again the woman to whom he thought he had been ungrateful and almost disloyal, had been a kind of humiliation. To get rid of this feeling, he had sought some means of repairing this wrong, and, thanks to my docility to him and my generosity towards her, he persuaded himself he had found a way.

In the state of affairs at that moment I had the advantage. I gained that day a new, but, alas! the last, triumph over my rival!

xx.

Lorenzo accompanied the marchioness to her carriage, and then returned an instant to inform me

she would dine with us that evening, and that he had invited Lando to join us. He embraced me af-

fectionately before he went away, looking at me with an expression that caused me a momentary joy, but which was followed by a feeling of melancholy as profound as if his kiss had been an adieu.

But though my apprehensions of the evening before were allayed, I could not get rid of a vague uneasiness impossible to overcome—perhaps the natural result of the hopes that, on the one hand, had been disappointed since the previous day, and, on the other, the fears that had been removed. But my mind was still greatly troubled, and though the atmosphere around me had apparently become calm and serene, I felt, so to speak, the earth tremble almost insensibly beneath my feet, and could hear the rumbling of thunder afar off.

My interview with Donna Faustina lasted so long that I had not been alone half an hour before Mme. de Kergy and her daughter were announced. This call, which, under any circumstances, would have given me pleasure, was particularly salutary at this moment, for it diverted my mind and effected a complete, beneficial change of impressions. After the somewhat feverish excitement I had just undergone, it was of especial benefit to see and converse with these agreeable companions of the evening before. I breathed more freely, and forgot Donna Faustina while listening to their delightful conversation. My eyes responded to Diana's smiling looks, and her mother inspired me with a mingled attraction and confidence that touched me and awakened in my soul the dearest, sweetest, and most poignant memories of the past. Mme. de Kergy perceived this, and likewise noticed, I think, the traces of recent agitation in my

face. She rose, as if fearing it would be indiscreet to prolong her visit.

"Oh! do not go yet," I said, taking hold of her hand to detain her.

"But you look fatigued or ill. I do not wish to abuse the permission you gave me."

"You do me good, on the contrary. I have a slight headache, it is true, but it is soothing to talk with you."

"Truly?"

"Yes, truly."

"Well, then, let me propose, in my turn, a drive in my carriage. The weather is fine to-day. Come and take the air with us. It will do you good, and afford us great pleasure."

I felt quite disposed on my part to accept the sympathy manifested by Mme. de Kergy, and at once accepted her invitation. I took a seat in her *calèche*, and, after an hour's drive with her and her daughter, I had not only recovered from the nervous agitation of the morning, but we had become fully acquainted, and for the first time in Paris I ceased to feel myself a stranger.

"What a pity you are going away so soon!" exclaimed Diana.

"Yes, indeed," said her mother; "for it seems to me you would find some resources at my house you have not found elsewhere, and we might reveal Paris under a different—perhaps I may say under a more favorable—aspect than it generally appears to strangers, even in the fashionable world, which is, I imagine, nearly the same everywhere."

I made no reply, for the regret she expressed awoke a similar feeling in my heart, and aroused all the recollections of the evening be-

fore. I once more felt for an instant an ardent desire to take refuge in a different sphere. I longed more earnestly than ever to escape from that in which some vague peril seemed to threaten me. We were, it is true, to leave Paris, but for what a motive! . . . What a pitiful aspect the life Lorenzo wished to escape from took in comparison with the one so different which Mme. de Kergy had just given me a glimpse of! . . . The thought of this contrast embittered the joy I felt in view of our departure.

We agreed, however, as we separated, to meet every day during this last week, and Mme. de Kergy promised to take me, before my departure, through various parts of the unknown world of charity in Paris, whose existence she had revealed to me, that I might, at least, have a less imperfect idea of it before leaving France.

On my return I found Lando as well as Lorenzo in the drawing-room, and learned that, as the weather was fine, they had decided we should dine at some *café* I do not now remember, in the Champs Elysées, and afterwards, instead of returning home, we should take seats under the trees, and quietly listen in the open air to the music of one of the famous orchestras. The hotel the Marquise de Villanera stopped at was on the way; we could call for her, and she would remain with us the rest of the evening.

This new programme did not displease me. I rather preferred this way of meeting the marchioness again, instead of the one I anticipated after Lorenzo told me she would dine with us. In spite of the favorable impression she produced, this prospect annoyed

me. The arrangement now proposed suited me better. I unhesitatingly assented to it, but could not help thinking, as I did so, how much I should have preferred passing the evening alone with him! . . . I longed for solitude—but shared with him! My heart was full of things I wished to give utterance to, and it seemed as if a kind of fatality multiplied obstacles around us, and kept us absorbed in matters wholly foreign to the sentiments I found it impossible to awaken during the too brief moments in which we were together. My heart was filled with these desires and regrets while I was preparing to accompany him, and they cast a shade over the evening I am giving an account of.

Lando took a seat in front of us, and our carriage soon drew up at the door of the marchioness, who followed us in her little *coupé*. She descended when we arrived at our place of destination, and Lorenzo, as was proper, gave her his arm. I took Lando's, and we proceeded towards the room that had been reserved for us, traversing on our way the principal coffee-room, which was filled with people. Every eye turned towards us.

I saw that Lando's vanity was more gratified than mine by the observations that reached our ears. I looked at Lorenzo; he too seemed to be proud of the effect produced by the one leaning on his arm, and for the first time did not appear to notice the flattering murmur of which I was the object. I noticed this, and it did not increase my good-humor. But after we arrived at the little dining-room that was ours for the time, Faus-tina seemed wholly occupied with me. We took off our bonnets, and while I was silently admiring her

magnificent tresses, which made her resemble some antique statue, she went into open ecstasy about my "golden hair," my form, and my features; but while she was thus going on, evidently supposing it was not displeasing to me, Lorenzo stopped her.

"Take care, marchioness," said he, smiling, "you do not know Ginevra. Do not take another step in that direction. No one can venture on that ground *but myself alone.*"

He uttered these last words with an accent that made my heart beat and rendered Faustina silent. An expression flashed from her blue eyes quicker than the sharpest lightning, and seemed to give them a terrible brilliancy. However, she soon resumed her playfulness and graceful ease of manner. Like most Italian ladies, she had that naturalness, that total absence of affectation, which often gives to their conversation an originality without parallel, and makes all wit which is less spontaneous than theirs seem factitious and almost defective. It has an inexpressible charm which fascinates, enchant's, sets every one at ease, and gives to their very coquetry an appearance of artlessness.

We were full of liveliness and gayety at the table. Never was a dinner more agreeable. Donna Faustina had an uncommon talent for relating things without appearing to try to win attention. She could mimic other women without any appearance of malice, and even sound their praises with an earnestness that made her more charming than those of whom she was speaking. Sometimes, too, she would change her tone, and, after making the room ring with our laughter, she would entertain us

with some serious account which displayed a powerful, cultivated mind, with all her exuberant gayety. In short, when she was present, nothing was thought of but her, and even those whom she wittingly or unwittingly threw into the shade could not deny the charm by which they were eclipsed.

It was, however, with some surprise I recalled after dinner the conversation that had affected me so strongly some hours before, and I asked myself if this was the melancholy, forsaken woman whose fate had moved me to tears.

She seemed to have almost read my thoughts; for, as we were returning to the open air, she left Lorenzo's arm, and came to take mine.

"Ginevra," said she in a low voice, "you find me gay and happy as a child this evening. It is because I no longer feel alone. I have found, not only friends, but a sister! . . . I am filled with love and gratitude to you."

The Champs Elysées were illuminated. We could see each other as distinctly as by daylight. She seemed much affected and sincere. Perhaps she spoke the truth at that moment. . . . Perhaps she had only looked deep enough into her own heart to feel persuaded that the romantic friendship she wished to make me believe in was real. However this may be, the illusion did not last long either for her, or Lorenzo, or myself.

The music was delightful, and I listened to it for some time in silence. Faustina had taken a seat at my right hand. Lorenzo sat next her, and Lando beside me.

"Bravo! Cousin Ginevra," said the latter in a low tone as soon as the first piece was ended. "Thank heaven, your influence is still all

it ought to be! . . . I am delighted, but not surprised!"

So many things had occupied my mind since my last conversation with him that I was at a loss to know what he referred to.

"You have persuaded Lorenzo to leave Paris?"

"No; he proposed going of his own accord."

"Indeed! When was that?"

"Last evening."

"And when are you to leave?"

"Next Monday."

"A whole week! It is a long time. . . . In spite of my personal regret to lose you, I wish your departure could take place sooner."

"And I also," I murmured without knowing why, for at that moment I was not at all preoccupied with the cause of Lando's anxiety.

"Endeavor, at least, to make him pass every evening like this. Your friend is pleasing; she amuses him, and may be able to divert him from other things."

"Lando, stop!" I exclaimed with a vehemence I could not repress. He uttered a slight excla-

mation of surprise, and I hastily continued, lest he might have comprehended me:

"Yes, be quiet, I beg, while they are playing the *Marche du Prophète*. I wish to hear it undisturbed."

But I did not listen to the *Marche du Prophète*. I only listened to—I only heard—the voices beside me. Lorenzo and his companion at first continued to converse in an animated manner on subjects apparently indifferent, but concerning people and places I was entirely ignorant of. . . . Recollections of the past were recalled which I knew nothing about. A long silence soon intervened, and when at last they resumed the conversation, it was in so low a tone I was unable to follow it.

Lorenzo and Lando returned on foot, and I took Donna Faustina home. Before separating we embraced each other once more, saying *au revoir*; but after leaving her I thought without any regret that before another week I should bid her a long farewell, and perhaps even then I should not have been sorry were it for ever.

xxi.

During the following week, that looked so long to Lando, and was indeed long enough to affect my whole life, what transpired? . . . Apparently nothing very different from the evening I have just described; nothing that did not seem the natural consequence of the intimacy so suddenly formed between Donna Faustina and myself, the recent date of which I alone seemed not to have forgotten. But little by little, I might say hour by hour, I felt a secret, powerful, subtle influence growing up around me, and the deepest instincts of my heart,

for a moment repressed, were violently roused, causing me to suffer all the pangs of doubt, anxiety, and the most cruel suspicion. But as nothing new seemed to justify these feelings, I forced myself to conceal them, for fear of rendering myself odious in Lorenzo's eyes and losing the charm of my generous confidence. Moreover, did not my continuing to manifest this confidence oblige him to merit it? . . . And could Faustina be treacherous while I was redoubling my cordiality and affection, and confiding in her as a friend? Was I not in a certain

manner protecting myself by obliging both of them in honor not to deceive me?

But honor, we know, in such cases—honor alone, without the holy restraints imposed by conscience—is a feeble barrier and a mere mockery. Those who imagine they have not overstepped this barrier sometimes make it recede before them, and believe themselves still within its limits when they are already far beyond the line it first marked out. . . .

A barrier so easily changed soon trenches on the enemy's ground, and the honor that is purely human—insufficient guardian of vows the most solemn—after violating the most sacred obligations, often becomes subject to some imaginary duty, and, according to a barbarous code that keeps pace with that of the Gospel amid all our civilization, persuades him whose sole guide it is that he would be disloyal if he ceased to be a traitor!

This is a sad, commonplace occurrence in the world, which does not excite anything more than a smile or a shrug of the shoulders on the part even of those who would tremble with indignation if any one should think them capable of betraying the confidence of a friend—what do I say?—even of a stranger or an enemy!

I will not undertake to follow Lorenzo in this obscure phase of his life. Neither will I try to penetrate into the soul of Faustina. I will only speak of the influence her crossing my path had on my life; for the account I have undertaken is one of bitter trials and formidable dangers, and the extraordinary grace I derived therefrom!

During the last week of our stay in Paris my time was strangely divided between Mme. de Kergy, who

came every morning to take me on the proposed rounds, and Donna Faustina, with whom I unfailingly found myself every evening. I thus daily went from one world to another exactly opposite, and seemed to undergo a periodical transformation, becoming, according to the hour, as different as the two women with whom I thus became simultaneously connected, but whom I never beheld together.

Every day I appreciated more fully the beneficial intimacy, that had commenced at the same time as the other intimacy, to which I already hesitated to give its true name, and I found more and more salutary the happy influences of the morning, which always diverted my mind from the annoying recollections of the evening before. Mme. de Kergy's simple dignity and sweetness of manner were allied with a noble mind and a large heart. Though somewhat imposing, every one felt at ease with her, because she entered into every one's feelings, criticised nobody, and only gave others the lesson of her example. I considered myself fortunate to see her so often, and wished I could always remain under her guidance.

I accompanied her in her charitable rounds through Paris, and at the sight of the misery I thus witnessed I felt I had never understood before to what an extent both misery and charity can extend. And yet poverty and humanity are to be found in all countries and in all climes. Certainly, we also have the poor amongst us, and Southern Italy is called, *par excellence*, the land of beggars and wretchedness. Nevertheless, when my imagination transported me to the gates of the convent where Don Placido daily distributed alms,

without any great discernment perhaps, but accompanied with pious words, received by those to whom they were addressed as alms of almost equal value, I asked myself if this did not somewhat counterbalance the excessive poverty and the lack of a more rigid and discriminating way of alleviating it. And when I witnessed the profound misery at Paris, augmented by the climate, and often embittered by hatred; when I saw this vast number greedy for the things of this world, but without any hope of those in a better, I asked myself if any possible compensation in the world could be given the poor who are deprived of the precious faith that would console, sustain, and ennable them. Yes, *ennoble* them; the word is not too strong to express the living exemplification of the Gospel I had often observed in accompanying Livia and Ottavia to the miserable habitations where they were welcomed so cordially. "Ah! signora," these so-called wretched creatures would sometimes say, looking at us with an air of compassion, "yes, we will pray for you, and our Lord will hear us; for, after all, *we poor* are his favorites. He chose to take upon himself our likeness, and not that of the rich."

A thousand expressions of the same nature crossed my mind while accompanying my noble, saintly friend to the places where she exercised, and taught her young daughter to exercise, a double mission of charity. One day in particular, seeing the charming Diana kneeling beside the bed of a poor old woman whose infirmities were incurable, but who was without religion, I recalled the words that fell from the lips of a poor woman at Naples who had implored the

cure of her malady through the intercession of some saint, *and had obtained it*, "Ah! mia cara signora, doctors are for the rich; as for us, we have the saints."

"You must relate all this to Gilbert," said Mme. de Kergy, listening to me with a beaming face. "In spite of the absorbing interest he takes in discoveries and inventions of all kinds, he is not incapable of comprehending this solution—the highest and most simple of all—of the great problem repeated under so many different forms. He would readily acknowledge that, viewed in this light, the inequalities of social life assume a wonderfully different aspect."

This was not the first time I had heard her speak in this way of Gilbert de Kergy since we had daily met. Among other things, she explained, on one occasion, the object of various associations of which he was an active member.

"He could explain all this much better than I," she added; "but I have urged him in vain to accompany us in our explorations through what I call his domain. He absolutely refuses, and, though I am accustomed to his uncivilized ways, they afflict me, because he often yields to them to the injury of others as well as himself."

One day, however, I found his card at my door when I returned home; but I had seen him only once since the meeting at the Hôtel de Kergy.

Saturday arrived, the day but one before our departure, and I was to take my last drive with Mme. de Kergy. I was suffering from a thousand conflicting emotions, agitated and melancholy, and sorry to be separated from her, and yet happy and impatient to leave Paris, where I now seemed to be-

hold nothing but two large blue eyes following me everywhere. On the other hand, however, a strange, inexplicable regret weighed on my heart when I thought of the world into which I had not yet penetrated, except in imagination, but where I longed to be transplanted with Lorenzo, that our lives might bring forth better fruit. While conversing with Mme. de Kergy such a life seemed less chimerical. I felt my wishes might easily be realized if . . . I could not wholly define my thought, but it was there, alive, actual, and poignant, and the recollection of its source added a degree of tenderness to the affectionate farewell I bade Mme. de Kergy when her carriage stopped to leave me at my door. My eyes were filled with tears. I found it difficult to tear myself away. She, on her part, pressed my hand, and, fastening her softest look on me, finally said :

"My dear Ginevra" (I had some time before begged her to call me so), "would it be indiscreet to ask you to come and dine with us to-morrow, and spend your last evening with us?"

"O madame!" I exclaimed with a joy I did not try to conceal, "how happy I should be to come!"

"Then I shall depend on seeing you—both of you; for of course my invitation extends likewise to the Duca di Valenzano."

I felt my face turn red simply at these words. Alas! why? Because I was at once terrified at the thought of conveying an invitation to Lorenzo which, ten days before, he would have eagerly accepted. Now I felt if he replied in the affirmative, it would be a triumph for me; if in the negative, a painful defeat.

All this rapidly crossed my mind,

and made me silent for a moment. Finally I replied :

"I do not know whether my husband has any engagement for to-morrow or not; but as for me, I hope nothing will prevent my coming. At all events, you shall have my reply in a few hours."

This reply was despatched at a late hour that same evening, and was to this effect: "That important business would oblige my husband to be absent the whole day, and I alone should be able to accept Mme. de. Kergy's invitation."

What it cost me to write this note Mme. de Kergy never imagined. And yet, when I hastily wrote these lines, I had no positive reason for doubting the truth of the excuse assigned for Lorenzo's absence—no reason except the promptings of my own heart, to which I was less able than ever, within a few hours, to impose silence.

But to relate what took place from the time I left Mme. de Kergy till I wrote her the above note :

That evening, as usual, I was to meet Donna Faustina, but not her alone. Our friends were to assemble to bid us farewell, and it was at this *soirée* I saw her for the first time in all the *éclat* of a brilliant toilet. And, though I was far from foreseeing it, it was there I spoke to her for the last time! . . . And I was still further from foreseeing in what place and in what way I should afterwards find myself beside her for an instant! . . .

We both attracted much attention that evening. Which of us was the more beautiful I cannot tell. As to this, I was indifferent to the opinion of all but one. What he thought I longed to know, and I now watched him in my turn. As I have said, he had good

reason to pride himself on his penetration; but that was a faculty by no means lacking on my part, and one, it may be remarked *en passant*, that Sicilians of both sexes are said to be rarely devoid of. In this respect we were well matched. I knew every line in his forehead, and understood every movement of his mouth and the slightest change in his mobile, expressive face, and during the whole evening, when for the first time I was able to observe them together without attracting his attention, I used as much art in studying him as he knew how to use in studying others. I followed them with my eyes around the room; whereas, separated from me by the crowd, he forgot my presence, and, by some phenomenon akin to that of second sight, every word they uttered seemed to resound distinctly in my ears! . . . It was with reluctance I gave her my hand when I left her. It was she, and not Lorenzo, who was at that moment the object of the resentment that burned in my heart.

I had doubtless overcome some of my faults at that time, but far from all. I was not so frivolous as is usually the case at my age. I loved everything great and noble. But with all this, I was impetuous, wilful, and jealous, and, though not occupied about my appearance, I was with myself. The happiness I had an indisputable right to was menaced. All means of defending my rights seemed allowable, but to use address, prudence, and management would have amounted almost to insincerity in my eyes.

Pretexts, and even excuses, are seldom wanting for yielding to the impulse of the moment. Therefore I yielded to mine when I again found myself alone with Lorenzo,

breaking a long silence which he did not notice, or would not ask the reason of, with a violent outburst I afterwards regretted, but which, at the moment, it seemed impossible to repress.

"I have tried to please you, Lorenzo, and must still believe in your sincerity, which it would kill me to doubt; but I can no longer have any faith in the false, perfidious friendship of that woman. . . . My heart, my whole soul, revolts against her. . . . God forgive me, Lorenzo, I really believe I hate her, and feel as if I could never see her again! . . ."

Such were a few of the hasty, incoherent words that escaped from my lips. Lorenzo, with folded arms, compressed brow, and a cold, ironical look of surprise, listened without interrupting me.

As I gazed at him, I felt my impetuosity die away and give place to intolerable anguish. My heart swelled, and I should have burst out into sobs had not a certain pride hindered me from responding to the icy coldness of his smile with tears. He did not excuse himself, and by no means tried to defend her whom I thus attacked. He made neither protestations nor reproaches.

"As you please, *cara mia*," said he with a calmness that seemed a thousand times more cruel than anger. "I will not attempt to oppose the furious fit of jealousy I see you are in. Indulge in it at your leisure. . . . Nothing is easier than to find some excuse for not spending to-morrow evening with Donna Faustina—and the day after, *ma belle Ginevra*," continued he with a sarcastic look that was more marked than his words. "You seem to forget we are both going away, and very probably you will never see

her again. . . . This is a reassuring circumstance, and ought to have sufficed, it seems to me, to prevent you from making so absurd a scene as this."

His manner and words completely disconcerted me. I now felt painfully mortified at my outburst, and an earnest desire to repair it. And yet the sensation caused by his injustice still raged in my heart. But I repressed this by degrees, and when Lorenzo was on the point of leaving the room, I said in a low tone :

"Forgive me; I was too hasty. But I have suffered more than you may have supposed."

He made no reply, and his coldness restored my self-control.

"It is not necessary to seek any pretext to avoid meeting Donna Faustina," continued I with a *sang-froid* nearly equal to his own. "Mme. de Kergy has invited me,

and you also, to dine there to-morrow, and pass the evening."

"Very well, go; nothing could be more fortunate. As for me, I shall not go with you. I have business I am obliged to finish before my departure. To-morrow I shall be absent all the morning, and shall not return in season to accompany you."

I knew through Lando what business he referred to. I knew he was to settle the next day the important accounts I had learned about the preceding Sunday. I recollect likewise that he was afterwards to dine with Lando. . . .

It was not, then, an imaginary excuse I had to transmit to Mme. de Kergy, and yet, when I wrote the note before mentioned, it was with a trembling hand and a heart heavier than it had ever been in my life!

XXII.

THE following day was as gloomy as might have been expected from the evening before. Never had I suffered such inexpressible anguish and distress.

It is useless to say that I went to church alone, as on the preceding Sunday, but I was not as calm and recollect ed as I was then. I was now in a state of irrepressible dissatisfaction with everything and everybody, myself not excepted, and yet I was very far from being in that humble disposition of mind which subdues all murmuring, extinguishes resentment, and throws a calm, serene light on the way one should walk in. I regretted my hastiness of the evening before, because I realized that a different course would have been more likely to further my wishes. In short, I felt I ought to have managed more skilfully, but it never occurred to me I might have been more patient. I found it difficult, above all, to calm the excessive irritation caused by the recollection of Lorenzo's manner throughout our interview. I compared it with his appearance on the day when he spoke to me for the first time concerning her.

What tenderness he then manifested! What confidence! What respect even! Even while uttering her name—alas! with emotion—how manifest it was that, while desirous of repairing his wrongs towards her, he felt incapable of any towards me! Not a week had

elapsed since that time, and yesterday how cold, how hard! What implacable and freezing irony! What an incredible change in his looks and words! Was it really Lorenzo who spoke to me in such a way? Was it really he who gave me so indifferent and almost disdainful a look? . . . No, he was no longer the same. A previous fascination had recovered its power, and the fatal charm over which I had so recently triumphed had regained its empire over a heart which I was, alas! too feeble to retain, because I had no sentiments more profound and elevated than those of nature to aid me!

As I have already said, I did not try to fathom Faustina's motives. I ought, however, to say a few words concerning her, if only through charity for him whom she had followed, like an angel of darkness, to disturb his legitimate happiness!

That she had long loved him I do not doubt—loved him with the unbridled passion that sways all such hearts as hers. She thought he would return to her. She believed she was preparing for herself a whole life of happiness by two years of apparent virtue. Mistaken, wounded, and desperate, she had at first yielded to an impetuous desire of perhaps merely seeing him once more; perhaps, also, to avenge herself by destroying the happiness that had defeated her dearest hopes.

She had calculated on the extent of her influence, and had calculated rightly. But in order to exert it, I was necessary to her design, and she played with consummate art the scene of our first encounter. She wished to take a near view of the enemy she hoped to vanquish; she must sound the heart she wished to smite. Alas! all that was worthy of esteem in that heart was not perceived by him, and it was natural to underrate a treasure not appreciated by its owner. What could I do, then? What advantage had I over her, if, in Lorenzo's eyes, I was not protected by a sacred, insurmountable barrier which he respected himself? What was my love in comparison with her passion? What was my intelligence in comparison with that which she possessed? My beauty beside the irresistible charm that had even fascinated me? Finally, my youth itself in comparison with all the advantages her unscrupulous vanity gave her over me? In fact, I think it seemed so easy at the first glance to vanquish me that she was almost disarmed herself. But I also believe she soon discovered something more in me than all she found so easy to eclipse. She saw I might in time succeed in acquiring an ascendancy over Lorenzo that no human influence could destroy. She saw I might kindle a flame in his soul it would be impossible to extinguish—a flame very different from that which either of us could be the object of. She saw I might lead him into a world where she could no longer be my rival, and that I wished to do so. She discerned the ardent though confused desire that was in my heart. In a word, she had on her side an intuition equal to that which I had on mine. She perceived the good there was in me, as I had fathomed

the evil there was in her, and she knew she must overpower my good influence, which would render him invulnerable whom she wished to captivate. She made use of all the weapons she possessed to conquer me, or rather, alas! to conquer him—weapons always deadly against hearts without defence. The very esteem she had heretofore won became a snare to him when her pride, her passion, changed their calculations—an additional snare, a danger that, combined with others, would be fatal! . . .

If I speak of her now in this way, it is not to gratify a resentment long since extinguished. Neither is it to palliate Lorenzo's offences against me and against God. It is solely to explain their secret cause, and to repeat once more that human love, even the most tender, is a frail foundation of that happiness in which God has no part; and honor likewise, even the highest and most unimpeachable, is a feeble guarantee of a fidelity of which God is not the bond, the witness, and the judge! . . .

I saw Lorenzo barely for a moment in the morning. I clearly perceived he wished to make me forget what had passed between us the evening before, but I did not see the least shade of regret. It was evident, on the contrary, that he thought himself magnanimous in overlooking my reproaches, and felt no concern at having merited them. In short, we seemed to have changed *rôles*. As for me, I suffered so much on account of the outhurst I had indulged in that it would have been easy to call forth acknowledgments that would have atoned for it. They only waited for the least word of affection, but not one did he utter. Lando came for him before two o'clock, and they went away together, leaving me with

a sad, heavy heart. I was not to see him again till my return from the Hôtel de Kergy. Where would he pass the time meanwhile? . . . Would it really be in Lando's company? And was the business they had to settle really such as to render it impossible for him to spend this last evening with me? . . . Would it not have been a thousand times better to have remained silent, and, as this was really our last day, and we were to leave on the next, would it not have been wiser in me to have spent it wholly with him, . . . even if that included her? . . . Had I not committed an irreparable folly in yielding to this explosion of unmistakable anger? This was indubitable, but it was too late to remedy it. The die was cast. Lorenzo was gone! I passed the afternoon, like that of the Sunday before, at church, but was pursued by a thousand distractions which I had not now the strength to resist. On the contrary, I took pleasure in dwelling on them, and my mind wandered without any effort on my part to prevent it. I neglected, on the very day of my life when I had the most need of light, courage, and assistance, to have recourse to the only Source whence they are to be obtained, and I returned home without having uttered a prayer.

Two hours later I was at the Hôtel de Kergy, and in the same room where just a week before I had felt such lively emotion and conceived such delightful hopes! But, ah! what a contrast between my feelings on that occasion and those of to-day! I seemed to have lived as many years since as there had been days! . . .

Mme. de Kergy advanced to meet me as I entered, and I saw she noticed the change in my face the moment she looked at me. I did

not know how to feign what I did not feel, and she had had too much experience not to perceive I had undergone some pain or chagrin since the evening before. She asked me no questions, however, but, on the contrary, began to speak of something foreign to myself; and this did me good. I soon felt my painful emotions diminish by degrees, and a change once more in the atmosphere around me, as when one passes from one clime to another.

The guests were but few in number, and all friends of the family. Diana, prettier than ever, and so lively as to excite my envy, was delighted to see me, but did not observe the cloud on my brow; and if she had, she would have been incapable of fathoming the cause. She hastened to point out the various guests who had arrived.

"They are all friends," said she; "for mother said you were coming to get a little respite from society."

Mme. de Kergy presented them to me one by one, and among the persons introduced were several of celebrity, whom I regarded with all the interest a first meeting adds to renown. But I saw nothing of Diana's brother among those present, and was beginning to wonder if I should never see him again, when, just as dinner was ready, he made his appearance. He bowed to me at a distance, appearing to have forgotten it was his place to escort me to the table. A sign from his mother seemed to bring him to himself, and he offered me his arm with some confusion, though without any awkwardness. But after taking a seat beside me, he remained for some moments without speaking, and then addressed his conversation to others instead of me. I saw he was for

some reason embarrassed, and I was confused myself; for such things are contagious. He soon recovered his accustomed ease, however, and when he finally addressed me it was with a simplicity that set me, on my part, entirely at ease. His conversation surprised and pleased me, and I felt I conversed better with him than any one else. There was nothing trifling in what he said, and, above all, he restrained from everything like a compliment, direct or indirect, and even from every subject that might lead either to me or himself. Women generally like nothing so much as a style of conversation that shows the effect they produce, so it was not astonishing it had been employed with me as well as with others. But this language had always embarrassed and displeased me, and I now felt proportionately pleased with the unusual way in which I was addressed—a way that seemed to raise me in my own estimation. And yet he did not try to absorb my attention, but gave others an opportunity of taking part in the conversation.

It soon became general, and I stopped to listen. I had then the pleasure—a new one for me—of witnessing a kind of game in which thoughts and opinions fly from one to another, wit mingles with gravity, and the intellect is brightened by contact with the brilliancy of others. Gilbert was not the only one in this circle who knew how to interest without fatiguing, and excite, not by ridicule, but by a better kind of wit, the hearty, cordial laugh that wounds neither the absent nor the present!

What struck me especially was the interest and almost deference with which a man of well-known eloquence, whose opinions had

weight with every one, endeavored to draw forth the opinions of others. It might have been said he listened even better than he talked.

Thus during the whole time we were at table, and the evening that followed, I realized the true meaning of the word *conversation* in a country where it originated, in the social world where it was coined, and in the language which is, of all mediums, the most delicate, the most perfect, and the most universal.

In spite of myself, I felt my sadness gradually vanish, and my laugh more than once mingled freely in the merriment of others. I saw that Mme. de Kergy observed this with pleasure, and a benevolent smile increased the habitual sweetness of her expression. She was a woman whose unvarying serenity was the result of great suffering, and who now sought nothing in this world but the happiness of others; to whose pains she was as fully alive as she was full of profound compassion.

She wore mourning, not only for her husband, but a number of children, of whom Gilbert and Diana were the sole survivors. But far from centring her affection on them, she seemed to have given to all who were young the love she had cherished for those who were gone, and the vacant places they had left in her maternal heart. I could not help regarding her with astonishment, for I belonged to a country where it is more common to die of grief than to learn how to live under its burden. I returned Mme. de Kergy's smile, and for an hour felt gay and almost happy. But by degrees the burden, removed for an instant, fell back on my heart. The reality of my troubles, and the thought of bidding farewell

to this delightful circle of friends, filled me with a melancholy it was impossible to repress. The regret that weighed on my heart was for a moment as profound as that we feel for our country when we fear never to behold it again.

I remained seated in an arm-chair near the fire-place, and fell into a reverie which was favored by Diana, who was at the piano. She was at that moment playing with consummate skill an air of Chopin's which seemed to give expression to my very thoughts. . . .

I awoke from my long reverie, and felt a blush mount to my very forehead when, raising my eyes, I found Gilbert's fixed on mine. . . . And mine were veiled with tears! I hastily brushed them away, stammering with confusion that Chopin's music always affected my nerves, and then, leaving my seat, I approached the piano, where Diana continued to play one air after another. . . . Gilbert remained with a pensive manner in the place where I left him, looking at me from a distance, and trying, perhaps, to conjecture the cause of my emotion.

But the approaching separation was sufficient to account for this. I was that very evening to bid a long farewell to these new friends, whom perhaps I should never meet

again in this world! And when the hour came, and Mme. de Kergy clasped me for the last time in her arms, I made no effort to restrain my tears. Diana wept also, and, throwing her arms around my neck, said:

"Oh! do not forget me. I love you so much!"

Her mother added with a tearful voice:

"May God watch over you wherever you go, my dear Ginevra! I shall follow you in spirit with as much interest as if I had known you always! . . ."

Gilbert offered me his arm, and conducted me to the carriage without uttering a word; but as I was on the point of entering it he said:

"Those you leave behind are greatly to be pitied, madame."

"And I am much more so," I replied, my tears continuing to flow without restraint.

He remained silent an instant, and then said:

"As for me, madame, I may hope to see you again, for I shall go to Naples, . . . if I dare."

"And why should you not dare? You know well we shall expect you and welcome you as a friend."

He made no reply, but after helping me into the carriage, and I had given him my hand, as I bade him adieu, he answered in a low tone: "*Au revoir!*"

XXIII.

Our journey through France and across the Alps did not in the least diminish the impressions of my last days in Paris. But everything was mingled in my recollections like the joy and regret I felt at my departure—joy and regret, both of which I had reason to feel, though I did not try to fathom their cause. I was only conscious that in more

than one way the repose and happiness of our life were threatened, and it was necessary we should take flight. It seemed as if we could not go fast enough or far enough. The very rapidity with which we travelled by railway was delightfully soothing, for it seconded my wishes. The sudden change of scenery and climate, and the

different aspect of the towns as soon as we crossed the mountains, also gave me pleasure, because all this greatly added in my imagination to the distance we had so rapidly come.

Lorenzo also, though doubtless for a different reason, seemed more at ease after we left Paris, and gradually resumed his usual manner towards me. He never mentioned Faustina's name, and I had only ventured to speak timidly of her once. As we were on the point of leaving, I proposed writing her a farewell note, but he prevented me by hastily stammering something to this effect: that my absence the evening before was a sufficient explanation for not seeing her again, and it was useless to take the trouble of any further farewell.

This new attitude surprised me. He had changed his mind, then, since the day he urged me so strongly to be her friend! . . . It is true I had myself expressed a vehement desire—too vehement, perhaps!—to break off this friendship. But he did not try in the least to profit by my present good-will to renew it. It was evident he no longer desired it himself. His only wish seemed to be to make me forget the scene that had occurred, as well as the cause that led to it. Why was this? If I had really been in the wrong, would he have forgiven me so readily? If, instead of this, his conscience forced him to excuse me, did not the affection he now manifested prove his desire to repair wrongs he could not avow, and which perhaps I did not suspect?

These thoughts involuntarily crossed my mind and heart with painful rapidity. I loved Lorenzo, or rather, I felt the need of loving him, above all things. But if he himself loved me no longer, if he

had become treacherous, unfaithful, and untrue to his word, could I continue to love him? Was this possible? . . . What would become of me in this case? Merciful heavens! . . . I asked myself these questions with a terror that could not have been greater had I been asking myself what would become of my eyes should they be deprived of light. And this comparison is just, for there could be no darker night than that which would have surrounded me had the ardent, predominant feeling of my heart been left without any object. I might suitably have taken for my motto: *Aimer ou mourir*—either love or die—words often uttered in a jesting, romantic, or trifling way, but which were to me full of profound, mysterious meaning. But this meaning was hidden from me, and the day was still far distant when its signification would be made manifest!

After crossing the Alps and the Apennines, and passing through Florence and Rome, we at length proceeded towards Naples by the delightful route that formerly crossed the Pontine Marshes, Terracina, and Mola di Gaëta. Every one who returns to Italy the first time after leaving it experiences a feeling of intoxication and joy a thousand times more lively than when one goes there for the first time. The eyes wander around in search of objects which once gave them pleasure and it had been a sacrifice to leave. I yielded to this enjoyment without attempting to resist it. Sadness, moreover, did not belong to my age, and, though intensely capable of it, it was by no means natural to me. During the first weeks after my return to Naples my mind was diverted from all my troubles and anxiety by

novelties that everything contributed to render efficacious and powerful.

In the first place, I was glad to find myself once more in my delightful home, which, by the order of Lorenzo, had undergone a multitude of improvements during my absence, and was now additionally embellished with the contents of the boxes we had brought from Paris. It was Lorenzo's taste, and not mine, which had dictated the choice of these numberless objects, the chief value of which in my eyes was derived from the estimation he attached to them himself.

The anxiety that clouded his face seemed to have disappeared. He appeared as delighted as I to find himself at home, and was quite disposed to resume his favorite occupation in his studio. Consequently, the clouds soon began to disperse from my soul; the sun once more began to brighten my life.

Lorenzo soon insisted, with an earnestness equal to that he had before shown to have me all to himself, that my door should now be constantly open. My drawing-room was filled with people of the best society and highest rank in Naples, and, thanks to their cordiality and natural turn for sudden intimacies (a characteristic, charming trait in that delightful region), instead of feeling at all embarrassed among so many new acquaintances, I felt as if surrounded by friends I had always known and loved.

Above all, I at last saw Livia once more, and though through a double grate, which prevented me from embracing her, it afforded me an unalloyed happiness which left no regrets.

The monastery she entered was situated at one extremity of Na-

ples, which could only be reached by traversing an endless number of narrow, gloomy, winding streets, in which it seemed impossible to move a step without knocking down the people on foot, overthrowing their shops, and even kitchens, established in the open air; and, if in a carriage, crushing the children playing, running about, or sleeping in the sun.

The first time a person ventures into such streets he is terrified at every step, and wonders he is allowed there. He feels guilty and like apologizing to every one he meets. But he soon sees he has done no harm; that everybody, young and old, mothers and children, the passers-by, the coachmen, and even the horses themselves, are endowed with a dexterity, good-humor, and at the same time an energy that make their way through everything. In a word, they all have such quickness of sight, hearing, and motion that not a day passes in which miracles of skill are not effected in these narrow streets, which not only prevent accidents from happening, but even from being feared, and you are at last unwilling to admit there is any crowd in Naples so compact, any street so narrow, or any descent so perilous, as to make it necessary to leave the vehicle you are in, or which the coachman who drives, and the horses he manages, cannot pass without danger.

At the end of some such way as I have described it was necessary, in addition to all this, in order to reach the monastery I am speaking of, to stop at the foot of an acclivity the horses could not ascend, not on account of its steepness, which would have been no obstacle, but because every now and then there were steps to facilitate the ascent

of pedestrians, but which rendered it impassable for equipages of any kind whatever. It had therefore to be ascended on foot, and, when once at the top, there was still a flight of fifteen or twenty steps to climb before reaching the broad terrace or platform before the gate through which strangers were admitted to the convent.

If this ascent was difficult, it must be confessed one felt repaid for the trouble of making it by the view from the terrace. Here the visitor wandered along the narrow, gloomy streets through the old, historic city, as well as its more elegant quarters, towards that side of the bay where Vesuvius was to be seen in its most striking aspect, and from the summit of the volcano followed its descent to the vast, smiling plain, more charming even in that direction than that to the sea by Ottagno, Stabia, and Castellamare. On every side the eye reposed on the verdant orange-trees growing in numberless gardens. Such was the outer world that encircled my sister's cloistered home. Such was the view from every window on this side of the convent. On the other there was a more quiet prospect, perhaps even better suited to contemplation—that of the cloister, with its broad arcades of fine architecture, which surrounded an enclosure planted with lemon-trees, in the centre of which stood a massive antique fountain of marble. The pines of Capo di Monte stood out against the clear sky, further off were the heights of Sant' Elmo, and along the horizon stretched the majestic line of mountains which form the background of the picture.

When able to tear my eyes from this magnificent prospect, lit up by all the fires of the setting sun, I

suddenly found myself in the somewhat gloomy vestibule of the monastery, whence I was conducted to a large parlor divided by a grate, behind which fell a long, black curtain. Here I was left alone, with the assurance I should soon see my sister. I felt an emotion I had not anticipated, and for the first time it seemed as if the most horrible separation had taken place between us. The admiration I had just experienced, and my joy at the prospect of seeing her again, both vanished. My heart swelled with painful emotion, and it was with more terror than devotion I looked up at a large crucifix—the only ornament on the bare wall in front of the *grille*. As to the grate itself, it filled me with horror, and I did not dare look at it.

All at once I heard the sound of a light step, the curtain was drawn quickly aside, and a beloved voice softly uttered my name: "Gina!" Turning around, I saw Livia, my sister, standing before me! The shock I received could not have been greater if, supposing her dead, I had seen her descend from the skies and appear thus suddenly before me. She wore the white veil of a novice, and her habit, as well as the band across her forehead and the *guimpe* around her neck, was of the same color. Her face was radiant. The dazzling rays of the setting sun suddenly poured in through the door of the cloister, left open behind her, and she seemed to be wholly enveloped in light. I gazed at her speechless with affection, surprise, and I know not what other indefinable emotion. . . . I was almost afraid to address her; but she did not appear to observe it. The words that rapidly fell from her lips were animated, natural, and affectionate as ever—

more affectionate even. And there was the same tone of anxious solicitude. But she was calmer, more serene, and even more gentle, and, though at times she had the same tone of decision, there was no trace of the sadness and austerity she sometimes manifested, in spite of herself, in former times when an invisible cross darkened everything around her. The band that concealed her hair revealed more clearly the extreme beauty of her eyes, and while I stood gazing at her as if I had never studied her features before, I felt she spoke truly in saying "the grates of the convent should neither hide her face nor her heart from me." Never had the one, I thought, so faithfully reflected the other.

As to her, she by no means perceived the effect she had produced. She was anxious to hear all I had been doing while absent, and asked me one question after another with the same familiarity with which we used to converse when side by side. Glad to be able to open my heart in this way, I forgot, when I began, all I had to say if I would conceal nothing from her. But my account soon became confused, and I suddenly stopped.

"Gina mia!" said she, "you do not tell me everything. Why is this? Is it because you think I no longer take any interest in your worldly affairs?"

"It is not that alone, Livia, but it is really very difficult to speak of Paris and the senseless life I led there before this grate and while looking at you as you are now."

"I shall always take as much pleasure in listening to you," said she, "as you do in talking to me. I admit, when our good aunt, Donna Clelia, comes to see me with her daughters, I often assume

a severe air, and tell them what I think of the world; . . . but I must confess my aunt does not get angry with me, for she depends on my vocation to procure husbands for Mariuccia and Teresina, who are worthy of them, because, as she says, a person who consecrates herself to God brings good-luck to all the family. She no longer regards me as a *jettatrice*, I assure you!"

She laughed as she said this, and I could not help exclaiming with surprise and envy:

"Livia, how happy you are to be so cheerful!"

Her face resumed its usual expression of sweet gravity, as she replied:

"I am cheerful, Gina, because I am happy. But you were formerly livelier than I. Why are you no longer so, my dear sister? Cheerfulness is for those whose souls are at peace."

"O Livia!" I cried, not able to avoid a sincere reply to so direct a question, "my heart is heavy with sorrow, I assure you, and the cheerfulness you speak of is frequently wanting."

She started with surprise at these words, and questioned me with an angelic look.

I did not delay my reply. I felt the need of opening my heart, and resumed the account I had broken off. I described without any circumlocution the life of pleasure to which I had given myself up, at first through curiosity and inclination, and in the end with weariness and disgust. I spoke of the day at Paris when fervor, devotion, and good impulses awoke in my soul, my meeting Mme. de Kergy, and all I had seen and felt in the places I had visited in her company.

Finally, I endeavored, with a trembling voice, to explain all my

hopes and wishes with respect to Lorenzo, and the nature of the projects and ambition I had for him. With a heart still affected at the remembrance I depicted the new happiness—the new and higher life I had dreamed of for him as well as myself!

Livia listened with joy to this part of my story, and her face brightened while I was speaking. But, without explaining the cause of my disappointment, I ended by telling her how complete it was, and this awoke so many bitter remembrances at once that I was suffocated with emotion, and for some moments I was unable to continue. . . .

A cloud passed over her brow, and she suffered me to weep some moments in silence.

"Your wishes were good and holy, Ginevra," said she at length, "and God will bless them sooner or later."

I paid no heed to her words. A torrent of bitterness, jealousy, and grief inundated my heart, and, feeling at liberty to say what concerned no one but myself, I gave vent to thoughts I had often dwelt on in silence, but now uttered aloud with vehemence and without any restriction.

Livia listened without interrupting me, and seemed affected at my impetuosity. Standing motionless on the other side of the *grille*, her hands crossed under her long, white scapular, and her downcast, thoughtful eyes fastened on the ground, she seemed for a time to be listening rather to the interior voice of my soul than to the words I uttered. At length she slowly raised her eyes, and said with an accent difficult to describe :

" You say your heart feels the need of some object of affection—that not to love would be death ?

You need, too, the assurance that the one you love is wholly worthy of your affection? . . . Really," continued she, smiling, "one would say you wish Lorenzo to be perfect, which of course he is not, even if as faultless as man is capable of being."

She stopped, and the smile that played on her lips became almost celestial. One would have said a ray of sunlight beamed across her face. She continued :

" I understand you, Ginevra; I understand you perfectly, perhaps even better than you do yourself, but I am not capable of solving the enigma that perplexes you—of drawing aside the veil that now obscures the light. . . . Oh ! if I could !" said she, clasping her hands and raising her eyes to heaven with fervor. " To solve all your doubts—to give you the light necessary to comprehend this mystery clearly—would require a miracle beyond the power of any human being. God alone can effect this. May he complete his work ! May you merit it ! "

The bell rang, and we hastily took leave of each other. It was dusk when I left her. She assured me I could make her a similar visit every week, and this prospect made me happy. I was happy to have seen her—happy to feel she could still descend to my level from the holier region she inhabited, and that there was nothing to hinder me from enjoying in the future the sweet intercourse of the past.

But however fully I opened my heart to Livia, I should have considered it profaning the purity of the air I breathed in her presence to utter the name of Faustina Reali. And, without knowing why, neither did I mention the name of Gilbert de Kergy.

XXIV.

Naples at that time was styled by some one "a small capital and a large city," and this designation was correct. The society, though on a small scale, was of the very highest grade, consisting of an aristocracy exempt from the least haughtiness, and retaining all the habits and manners of bygone times. However frivolous this society might be in appearance, its defects were somewhat redeemed by an originality and lack of affectation which wholly excluded the vexatious and insupportable *ennui* produced by frivolity and pretension when, as often happens, they are found together. With a few exceptions, devoid of great talents or very profound acquirements, it had wit in abundance, as well as a singular aptitude for seizing and comprehending everything. If to all this we add the most cordial reception and the readiest, warmest welcome, it will at once be seen that those who were admitted to this circle could not help carrying away an ineffaceable remembrance of it.

But the special, characteristic trait which distinguished Naples from every other city, large or small, was, strange to say, and yet true, the utter absence of all gossip, slander, or ridicule. The women unanimously defended one another, and no man, under the penalty of being considered ill-bred, ever ventured to speak ill of one of their number, unless perhaps by one of those slight movements of the features which constitute, in that country, a language apart—very eloquent, it is true, and perfectly understood by every one, but which never produces the same effect as actual words. It was generally

said, and almost always with truth, whenever there was any new gossip in circulation, which sometimes happened, that "no doubt some stranger had a finger in it"! To complete this picture, we will add that there was a circle of ladies in Neapolitan society who fully equalled in beauty and grace the generation before them, which was celebrated in this respect throughout Italy.

It may be affirmed, therefore, without fear of denial on the part of any contemporary, that the general result of all this was to produce a kind of *beau-ideal* of gay society.

Among these ladies was one I particularly remarked, and who speedily became my friend. Lorenzo had predicted this the day (afterwards so fatally memorable to me) when for the first time the name of the Contessa Stella di San Giulio met my eyes. To tell the truth, this remembrance at first took away all desire to make her acquaintance. It seemed to me (yielding no doubt to a local superstition) that the day on which I first heard the name of Faustina could bring me no luck. But this prejudice was soon overcome. It was sufficient to see her to feel at once attracted towards her. At first sight, however, there was something imposing in her features and manner, but this impression immediately changed. As soon as she began to converse, her eyes, the pleasing outline of her face, and her whole person, were lit up by an enchanting smile on her half-open lips—a smile that the pencil of Leonardo da Vinci alone could depict. It is among the women who served as models to this great, incomparable master that a likeness to Stella must be sought. It

is by studying the faces of which he has left us the inimitable type we recognize, notwithstanding their smiling expression, a certain firmness and energy which exclude all idea of weakness, nonchalance, or indolence. Stella's physiognomy, too, expressed courage and patience, and they were predominant traits in her character. She was, however, vivacious, versatile, and so lively as to seem at times to take too light a view of everything; but, when better known, no one could help admiring the rare faculty with which heaven enabled her to bear cheerfully the heavy trials of life, and feeling that her gayety was courage in its most attractive aspect.

Married at eighteen, she had seen this union, with which convenience had more to do than inclination, dissolved at the end of two years: her husband died soon after the birth of her only child. From that time family circumstances obliged her to live with an uncle, who was the guardian of her child, and had, in this capacity, the right to meddle with everything relating to both mother and daughter—a right which his wife, a woman of difficult and imperious temper, likewise arrogated in a manner that would have exhausted the patience of any one else; but Stella's never failed her. Feeling it important for the future interests of her little Angiolina to accept the condition imposed by her widowhood, she submitted to it courageously without asking if there was any merit in so doing. Her liveliness, which had been so long subdued, returned beneath the smiles of her child, and, as often happens to those who are young, nature gained the ascendancy and triumphed over all there was to depress her. Angiolina was

now five years old, and was growing up without perceiving the gloomy atmosphere that surrounded the nest of affection and joy in which her mother sheltered her, and the latter found her child so sweet a resource that she no longer seemed to feel anything was wanting in her lot.

This intimacy added much to the happiness of a life which began to please me far beyond my expectations. The gay world, with which I thought myself so completely disgusted, took a new and more subtle aspect in my eyes than that I had so soon become weary of. But in yielding to this charm it seemed to me I was pleasing Lorenzo and seconding his desire to make our house one of the most brilliant in Naples. Nevertheless, he resumed his labors, and passed whole hours in his studio, where he seemed wholly absorbed, as formerly, in his art. I found him there more than anywhere else, as he was before our fatal journey. He had begun again with renewed ardor on his *Vestal*, which was now nearly completed, and was considered the most perfect work that ever issued from his hands. He attributed the honor of his success to his model, and, though formerly more annoyed than flattered by suffrages of this kind, I now welcomed the compliment as a presage of days like those of former times.

The first time I entered the studio after my return I sought with jealous anxiety some trace of the remembrance that haunted me, and seemed to find it on every hand. In a *Sappho* whose passionate, tragical expression alone had struck me before, and the *Bacchante* which seemed at once beautiful and repulsive, I imagined I could trace the features, alas! too perfect not

to be graven in the imagination of a sculptor in spite of himself. . . . I saw them, above all, in a Proserpine, hidden by accident, or on purpose, in an obscure corner of the studio, which struck me as a sudden apparition of her fatal beauty. Finally, I saw them also in the other Vestal, to which the one I sat for was the pendant. It was then only I remembered with pleasure he said when he first began it that *no one before me* had realized the ideal he was trying to embody.

Haunted by these recollections, I began to find my sittings in the studio painful and annoying, but I did not manifest my feelings. I had acquired some control over them, and felt it was not for my interest to revive, by a fresh display of jealousy, a remembrance that seemed to be dormant, or again excite a displeasure that appeared to be extinguished. Besides, the likeness that haunted me so persistently became in time more vague and uncertain, and seemed likely to disappear entirely. The current of gayety and pleasure that now surrounded me absorbed me more and more. The very light of the sun at Naples is a feast for the heart as well as the eyes. It is a region that has no sympathy with gloom, or even the serious side of life, and it must be confessed that the social ideal I have spoken of is not the most salutary and elevated in the world. It must also be acknowledged that if it is not absolutely true that this charming region is the classic land of the *far niente*, as it has been called (for the number of people everywhere who do nothing make me think all skies and all climes favorable to them), it is nevertheless indubitable that every one feels a mingled excitement

and languor at Naples which oblige him to struggle continually against the double temptation to enjoy at all hours the beauty of the earth and sky, and afterwards to give himself up unresistingly to the repose he feels the need of. When weary of this struggle, when nothing stimulates his courage to continue it, he is soon intoxicated and overpowered by the very pleasure of living. One day follows another without thinking to ask how they have been spent. The interest taken in serious things grows less, the strength necessary for such things diminishes, all effort is burdensome; and as this joyous, futile life does not seem in any way wrong or dangerous, he no longer tries to resist it, but suffers the subtle poison which circulates in the air to infuse inactivity into the mind, indifference and effeminacy in the heart, and even to the depths of the soul itself.

Such were the influences to which I gave myself up, but not without some excuse, perhaps. At my age this reaction of gayety and love of pleasure was natural. After the experience I had passed through, I felt the need of something to divert me—the need of forgetting. How, then, could I possibly resist all there was around me to amuse and enable me to forget? Of course I had not forgotten Mme. de Kergy, or Diana, or the eloquence of Gilbert, but I had nearly lost all the pure, noble, and soul-stirring sentiments my acquaintance with them had awakened; and if any unacknowledged danger lurked therein, it had so ephemeral an influence on me that all trace was effaced, as a deadly odor passes away that we only inhaled for a moment.

As for my charming Stella, she no more thought of giving me

advice than of setting me an example. She shared with me her happiest hours in the day, but I could not follow her in the courageous course of her hidden daily life. I did not see her during the hours when, with a brow as serene, a face as tranquil, as that with which she welcomed me at a later hour, she immolated her tastes and wishes, and by the perpetual sacrifice of herself earned the means of rendering her daughter as happy as she pleased. I saw her, on the contrary, during my daily drive with her and Angiolina—one of the greatest pleasures of the day for us all. To see them together, the mother as merry as the child, one would have supposed the one as happy, as fully exempt from all care, as the other! . . . We often took long drives in this way, sometimes beyond the extreme point of Posillipo, sometimes to Portici, or even to Capo di Monte. There we would leave our carriage and forget ourselves in long conversations while Angiolina was running about, coming every now and then to throw herself into her mother's arms or mine. I loved her passionately, and it often seemed to me, as I embraced her, that I felt for her something of that love which is the strongest on earth, and makes us endure the privation of all other affection. Angiolina was, it is true, one of those children better fitted than most to touch the maternal fibre that is hidden in every womanly heart. She had accents, looks, and moods of silence which seemed to indicate a soul attentive to voices that are not of this world, and sometimes, at the sight of her expressive childish face, one could not help wondering if she did not already hear those of heaven.

Lorenzo from time to time made

a journey to the North of Italy, in order to see to his property. His absence, always short, and invariably explained, caused me neither pain nor offence. He seemed happy to see me again at his return, and appeared to enjoy much more than I, even, the gay life we both led. He devoted his mornings to work, but spent his evenings with me, either in society or at the theatre of San Carlo, where, according to the Italian custom in those days, we went much less to enjoy the play, or even the music, than to meet our friends. As for gaming, I had reason to believe he had entirely renounced it, for he never touched a card in my presence. The twofold danger, therefore, which had threatened my peace, seemed wholly averted, and I once more resumed my way with confidence and security, as a bird, beaten by the tempest, expands its wings at the return of the sun, and sings, as it flies heavenward, as if clouds and darkness were never to return!

But in the midst of this new dawn of happiness I was gliding almost imperceptibly but rapidly down, and suffering my days to pass in constantly-increasing indolence. It is true my good Ottavia, who had been with me since Livia's entrance at the convent, reminded me of the days and hours assigned for the practices of devotion she had taught me in my childhood, which, though not piety itself, serve to keep it alive. Without her I should probably have forgotten them all. I thought of nothing but how to be happy, and I was so because I seemed to have recovered absolute empire over Lorenzo's heart. . . . My lofty aspirations for him had vanished like some fanciful dream no longer remem-

bered. The charm of his mental qualities and his personal attractions gave him a kind of supremacy in the circle where he occupied the foremost rank, and had every desirable pretext for gratifying his taste for display; while, on the other hand, the aureola of genius that surrounded him prevented his life from appearing, and even from being, wholly vain.

It was vain, however, as every one's life is that has no light from above. I was not yet wholly incapable of feeling this, but I was

becoming more and more incapable of suffering from it.

It is not in this way the vigor of the soul is maintained or renewed. Livia alone had not lost her beneficent influence over me. A word from her had the same effect as the strong, correct tone of the diapason, which gives the ear warning when the notes begin to flatten. Every descent, however gradual, is difficult to climb again, and I did not at all perceive the ground I had lost till I found myself face to face with new trials and new dangers.

xxv.

Several months passed, however, without any change in my happy, untroubled life. Lando's arrival, and shortly after that of Mario, were the chief incidents. Mario's visits were short and rare, for he seldom left my father. He loved home, now he was alone there, better than he used to do; and my father, relieved of a heavy responsibility by the marriage of one daughter and the vocation of the other, enjoyed more than ever the company of a son who gave him no anxiety and prevented him from finding his solitude irksome. He only lived now in the recollections of the past and for his profession, and Mario fulfilled with cheerful devotedness the additional obligations our departure had imposed on him. He came from time to time to see his two sisters, and had not entirely lost the habit of favoring me with advice and remonstrances. Nevertheless, as my present position obliged me to make a certain display he was not sorry to have a part in, and as, on the whole, he did not find my house disagreeable, it was not as difficult as it once was to win his approbation,

particularly as, notwithstanding the frivolous life I led, I was still (perhaps a strange thing) wholly devoid of coquetry and vanity, which, almost as much as my affection for Lorenzo, served as a safeguard in the world, and not only shielded me from its real dangers, but from all criticism. This point acknowledged, Mario, who did not consider himself dispensed by my marriage from watching over my reputation, was as kind to me now as he would have been implacable had it been otherwise. As I, on my side, by no means feared his oversight, and he brought news of my father and recalled the memories of the past, which I continued to cherish in my present life, I welcomed him with affection, and his visits always afforded me pleasure.

As to Lando, he had been forced to tear himself away from Paris, and devote to economy an entire year which he had come very reluctantly to spend in the bosom of his family. He at once observed with astonishment that I was happier at Naples than at Paris. As for him, he declared life in a small city was an

impossibility, and he should pass the time of his exile in absolute exclusion. But he contented himself with carrying this Parisian nostalgia from one drawing-room to another, exhaling his complaints sometimes in Italian (continually *grasseyan*), sometimes in French sprinkled with the most recent *argot*, only comprehensible to the initiated. But as, in spite of all this, his natural good-humor was never at fault, everything else was overlooked, and he was welcomed everywhere; so existence gradually became endurable, and he resigned himself to it so completely that by the time the Carnival approached he was so thoroughly renaturalized that no one was more forward than he in preparing and organizing all the amusements with which it terminates at Naples—vehicles, costumes, *confetti*, and flowers for the Toledo,* suppers, dominos, and disguises for the Festini di San Carlo,† without reckoning the great fancy ball at the Accademia; ‡ and, to crown all, private theatricals with a view to Lent. With all this, he had ample means of escaping all danger of dying of *ennui* before Easter! . . .

I must acknowledge, however, that he found me as much disposed to aid him as any one. I was in one of those fits of exuberant gayety which at Naples, and even at Rome, sometimes seize even the most reasonable and sensible people during the follies of the Carnival. But it must be confessed these follies had not in Italy the gross, vulgar, and repulsive aspect which public gayety sometimes assumes

* The Strada di Toledo, where the maskers assemble, and the combats with *confetti* take place during the Carnival.

† *Bals masques*.

‡ The name of the place where large public and private balls are given by the Neapolitan nobility, to whom one must belong to have the right to subscribe

at Paris on similar occasions. One would suppose everybody at Paris more or less wicked at Carnival time; whereas at Rome and Naples everybody seems to be more or less childlike. Is this more in appearance than reality? Must we believe the amount of evil the same everywhere during these days devoted to pleasure? I cannot say. At Rome, we know, no less than at Paris and Naples, while people on the Corso are pelting each other with *confetti* and lighting the *moccoletti*, the churches are also illuminated, and a numerous crowd, prostrate before the Blessed Sacrament exposed on the altars, pray in order to expiate the follies of the merry crowd. But it seems to me no one who has made the comparison would hesitate to acknowledge a great difference in the gayety of these places, as well as the different amusements it inspires.

Stella was in as gay a mood as I. Angiolina (whose right it was) could not have prepared more enthusiastically than we to throw *confetti* at every one we met, or pelt the vehicles in which most of the gentlemen of the place, arrayed in various disguises, drive up and down the Toledo. These vehicles are stormed with missiles from every balcony they pass, and they reply by handfuls of *confetti* and flowers thrown to the highest stories, either by means of cornets, or by instruments expressly for this purpose, or by climbing the staging made on the carriages to bring the combatants nearer together.

Lorenzo, Lando, and even Mario were enrolled among the number to man a wonderful gondola of the XVth century, all clad in the costume of that period, and Lorenzo, by his taste and uncommon acquirements of all kinds, contributed to

render this masquerade almost interesting from an artistic and historic point of view, and he was as zealous about it as any one.

We were in the very midst of these preparations when one morning he told me with an air of vexation he had just received a letter from his agent which would oblige him to be absent several days. But he was only to go to Bologna this time, and would be back without fail the eve of *Jeudi-Gras*,* the day fixed for the last exhibition of the gondola. But his departure afflicted me the more because he had not been absent for a long time, and I was no longer used to it. I did not, therefore, conceal my annoyance. But as his seemed to be equally great, I finally saw him depart, not without regret, but without the least shade of my former distrust.

The Carnival was late that year, and the coming of spring was already perceptible in the air. I had passed two hours with Stella in the park of Capo di Monte, while Angiolina was filling her basket with the violets that grew among the grass. Our enjoyment was increased by the freshness of the season and the enchanting sky of Naples. When the circumstances of a person's life are not absolutely at variance with the beauty of nature, he feels a transport here not experienced in any other place. That day I was happier and merrier than usual, and yet, as we were about to leave the park, I all at once felt that vague kind of sadness which always throws its cloud over excessive joy.

"One moment longer, Stella," said I, "it is so lovely here. I never saw the sea and sky so blue before! I cannot bear to go home."

* Thursday before Lent.

"Remain as long as you please, Ginevra. I am never tired, you know, of the beautiful prospect before us! Nature is to me a mother, a friend, and a support. She has so often enabled me to endure life."

"Poor Stella!" said I with a slight remorse, for I felt I was too often unmindful of the difference in our lots.

But she continued with her charming smile:

"You see, Ginevra, they say I have *le sang joyeux*! which means, I suppose, that I have a happy disposition. When all other means fail of gratifying my natural turn, I can do it by looking around me. The very radiance of the heavens suffices to fill me with torrents of joy."

At that moment Angiolina ran up with a little bunch of violets she had tied together, and gave them to her mother. Stella took the child up in her arms.

"Look, Ginevra. See how blue my Angiolina's eyes are. Their color is a thousand times lovelier than that of the sky or sea, is it not? Come, let us not talk of my troubles," continued she, as her daughter threw her arms around her neck, and leaned her cheek against hers. "This treasure is sufficient; I ask no other."

"Yes, Stella, you are right. To enjoy such a happiness I would give all I possess."

"God will doubtless grant you this happiness some day," reviled she, smiling.

Our merriment, interrupted for a moment, now resumed its course. It was time to go home, and we returned without delay to the carriage, which awaited us at the gate of the park.

It was Tuesday, the day but one

before *Jeudi-Gras*; consequently I expected Lorenzo the following day. All the preparations for the masquerade were completed, and in passing by the door of my aunt, Donna Clelia, who lived on the Toledo, I proposed to Stella we should call to make sure she had attended to her part; for it was from her balcony the first great contest with *confetti* was to take place the next day but one.

Donna Clelia, as I have remarked, felt a slight degree of ill-humor at the time of my marriage. But she speedily concluded to regard the event with a favorable eye. It would doubtless have been more agreeable to be able to say: "The duke, my son-in-law"; but if she could not have this satisfaction, it was something to be able to say: "My niece, the duchess," and my aunt did not deny herself this pleasure.

Besides, she anticipated another advantage of more importance—of obtaining an entrance by my means to high life, which hitherto she had only seen at an immeasurable distance; and she was still more anxious to introduce her daughters than to enter herself. From the day of my marriage, therefore, she resolved to establish herself at Naples, and this resolution had already had the most happy results. Teresa and Mariuccia were large girls, rather devoid of style, but not of beauty. Thanks to our relationship, they were invited almost everywhere, and the dream of their mother was almost realized. As I had indubitably contributed to this, and they had the good grace to acknowledge it, I was on the best terms with them as well as with Donna Clelia. The latter, it will be readily imagined, had enthusiastically acceded to my request to allow the

cream of the *beau monde* to occupy her balconies on *Jeudi-Gras*, and we found her now in the full tide of the preparations she considered necessary for so great an event.

My aunt had apartments of good size on the first floor of one of the large palaces on the Strada di Toledo. They were dark and gloomy in the morning, like all in that locality, but in the evening, when her drawing-rooms were lit up, they produced a very good effect. As to Donna Clelia herself, when her voluminous person was encased in a suit of black velvet, and her locks, boldly turned back, had the addition of a false *chignon*, a plume of red feathers, and superb diamonds, she sustained very creditably, as I can testify, the part of a dignified matron, and it was easy to see she had been in her day handsomer than either of her daughters. But when she received us on this occasion, enveloped in an enormous wrapper, which indicated that, in spite of the advanced hour, she had not even begun her toilet, and with her hair reduced to its simplest expression, she presented quite a different aspect. She was, however, by no means disconcerted when we made our appearance, but met us, on the contrary, with open arms; for she was very glad of an opportunity of explaining all the arrangements she was at that instant occupied in superintending, which likewise accounted for the *négligé* in which we surprised her. She took us all through the drawing-rooms, pointing out in the penumbra the places, here and there, where she intended to place a profusion of flowers. Here a large table would stand, loaded with everything that would aid us in repairing our strength during the contest; and there were genuine tubs for the *confetti*.

where we should find an inexhaustible supply of ammunition. My aunt was rich. She spared nothing for her own amusement or to amuse others, and never had she found a better occasion for spending her money. She had already given two successful *soirées*, at which her large drawing-rooms were filled, but this crowd did not include everybody, and those who were absent were precisely those she was most anxious to have, and the very ones who, on *Jeudi-Gras*, were to give her the pleasure of making use of her rooms. She did not dream of fathoming their motives ; it was enough to have their presence.

At last, after examining and approving everything, as disorder reigned in the drawing-room, my aunt took us to her chamber. She gave Stella and myself two arm-chairs that were there, placed on the floor a supply of biscuits, candied chestnuts, and mandarines for Angiolina's benefit, and seated herself on the foot of her bedstead, taking for a seat the bare wood ; the mattress, pillows, and coverings being rolled up during the day, according to the Neapolitan custom, like an enormous bale of goods, at the other end of the bedstead. Arming herself with an immense fan, which she vigorously waved to and fro, she set herself to work to entertain us. First, she replied to my questions :

" You ask where the *ragazze** are. . . . I didn't tell you, then, they are gone on a trip to Sorrento with the *baronessa* ? "

" No, Zia Clelia, you did not tell me. When will they return ? "

* Oh ! in a short time. I expect them before night. It was such fine weather yesterday ! They did

not like to refuse to accompany the baroness, but it would not please them to lose two days of the Carnival, and the baroness wouldn't, for anything in the world, miss her part at San Carlo. Teresina is to go there with her this evening."

The baroness in question was a friend of my aunt's whom she particularly liked to boast of before me. If she was indebted to me for some of the acquaintances she was so proud of, she lost no opportunity of reminding me that for this one she was solely indebted to herself.

" Ah ! Ginevra mia ! . . ." continued she, " you have a fine house, to be sure—I can certainly say nothing to the contrary ; but if you could only see that of the baroness ! . . . Such furniture ! Such mirrors ! Such gilding ! . . . And then what a view ! . . ."

Here my aunt kissed the ends of her five fingers, and then opened her whole hand wide, expressing by this pantomime a degree of admiration for which words did not suffice. . . .

" How ? " said Stella with an air of surprise. " I thought her house was near here, and that there was no view at all. It seems to me she can see nothing from her windows."

" No view ! " cried Donna Clelia. " No view from the baroness' house ! . . . See nothing from her windows ! . . . What a strange mistake, Contessa Stella ! You are in the greatest error. You can see everything from her windows—*everything* ! Not a carriage, not a donkey, not a horse, not a man or woman on foot or horseback or in a carriage, can pass by without being seen ; and as all the drawing-rooms are *al primo piano*, you can see them as plainly as I see you, and distinguish the color of

* The girls.

their cravats and the shape of the ladies' cloaks."

"Ah! yes, yes, Zia Clelia, you are right. It is Stella who is wrong. The baroness has an admirable view, and quite suited to her tastes."

"And then," continued Donna Clelia, waving her fan more deliberately to give greater emphasis to her words, "a situation unparalleled in the whole city of Naples! . . . A church on one side, and the new theatre on the other! And so near at the right and left that—imagine it!—there is a little gallery, which she has the key of, on one side, leading to the church; and on the other a passage, of which she also has the key, which leads straight to her box in the theatre! I ask if you can imagine anything more convenient? . . . But, apropos, Ginevra, have you seen Livia lately?"

"Yes, I see her every week."

"Ah! *par exemple*," said Donna Clelia, folding her hands, "there is a saint for you! But I have stopped going to see her since the Carnival began, because every time I go I feel I ought to become better, and the very next day off I go to confession. . . . It has precisely the same effect on the *ragazze*; so they have begged me not to take them to the convent again before Ash-Wednesday."

Stella, less accustomed than I to my aunt's style of conversation, burst into laughter, and I did the same, though I thought she expressed very well in her way the effects of her visits at the convent. At that minute the doors opened with a bang, and Teresina and Mariuccia made their appearance, loaded with flowers. At the sight of us there were exclamations of joy:

"O Ginevra! . . . Contessa! . . . E la bambina! *Che piacere!*

. . . How delightful to find you here!"

A general embrace all around. Then details of all kinds—a stream of words almost incomprehensible.

"Che tempo! Che bellezza! Che paradiso!" They had been amused *quanto mai!* And on the way back, moreover, they had met Don Landolfo, and Don Landolfo had invited Teresina to dance a cotillon with him at the ball to-morrow. . . . And Don Landolfo said Mariuccia's toilet at the ball last Saturday was *un amore!*"

It should be observed here that everything Lando said was taken very seriously in this household. His opinion was law in everything relating to dress, and he himself did not disdain giving these girls advice which cultivated notions of good taste, from which they were too often tempted to deviate.

We were on the point of leaving when Mariuccia exclaimed:

"Oh! apropos, Ginevrina, Teresina thought she saw Duke Lorenzo at Sorrento at a distance."

"Lorenzo? . . . At Sorrento? No, you are mistaken, Teresina. He went to Bologna a week ago, and will not be back till to-morrow."

"You hear?" said Mariuccia to her sister. "I told you you were mistaken—that it was not he."

"It is strange," said Teresina. "At all events, it was some one who resembled him very much. It is true, I barely saw him a second."

"And where was it?" I asked with a slight tremor of the heart.

"At the window of a small villa away from the road at the end of a *masseria** we happened to pass on the way."

She was mistaken, it was evident; but when Lorenzo returned that eve-

* An enclosure planted with maize, vines, and orange-trees.

ning, a day sooner than I expected, I felt a slight misgiving at seeing him. He perceived it, and smilingly asked if I was sorry because he had hastened his return. I was tempted to tell him what troubled me, but was ashamed of

the new suspicion such an explanation would have revealed, and I reproached myself for it as an injustice to him. I checked myself, therefore, and forced myself to forget, or at least to pay no attention to, the gossip of my cousins.

xxvi.

AMONG the amusements of the Carnival, there was one in which I was not in the least tempted to take part—that of the *bal masqué*, or, as it was called, the *Festino di San Carlo*. I ought to remark here, however, that it was with respect to this amusement, above all, Naples differed from Paris. There was no resemblance between the *bals masqués* at San Carlo and those given at the opera in Paris. No virtuous or even prudent woman, I imagine, would think of venturing to attend the latter; whereas at San Carlo it was not only common to find married women of rank, but even young ladies under their mothers' protection as at any other ball. They wore their masks awhile, amusing themselves, if they had the turn, with mystifying their friends; then, at a certain hour, several rooms having been formed by uniting a number of boxes, and illuminated, they all laid aside their masks, and the various coteries, in groups of ten, fifteen, or twenty persons, took supper together. I certainly do not pretend to deny (my story itself would forbid it) that the opportunity of profiting by this disguise, in order to pass the evening in a less inoffensive manner, was not made use of by more than

one of the company. It could not be otherwise, perhaps, in a place where this kind of folly reigns, even in a mitigated form. I only wish to describe its general character at that time.

I had not, however, the least inclination to attend. The very thought of wearing a mask was repugnant to me, and to see anybody else with one on caused me a kind of fear. Besides, I never could understand what pleasure was to be found in a mystery of this kind, which always seemed childish and trivial, if not culpable and dangerous. I had neither the faculty of disguising my voice nor of making use of the jargon that constitutes the spirit of a *bal masqué*. I therefore flatly refused to join a party of twenty persons who were to attend the *Festino on Jeudi-Gras*, and, after participating for awhile in the amusements of the ball-room, were to take supper together.

Stella had neither my repugnance nor my incapacity. She knew how to play the part of another with grace and skill, and had been urged, as well as I, to join this merry party; but she denied herself the pleasure in order to attend a family supper with her aged relatives and their friends, and we decided with

mutual accord that our amusement for the day should be confined to that which awaited us on my aunt's balcony on the Toledo.

The hour came at last, and found us under arms—that is to say, our faces protected by a kind of visor of wire netting, and all of us, except my aunt, dressed in such a way as not to fear the clouds of flour we were to face, as well as the missiles which, under the name of *confetti*, were fearful to encounter, and had nothing sweet about them but the name. Some carried their precaution so far as to prepare a *costume de bataille* expressly for the occasion. Of this number were Teresina and Mariuccia, who, at Lando's suggestion, had provided themselves with dresses of white cotton ornamented with bows of rose-colored ribbon, which enabled them to encounter the showers of missiles, and were so becoming that they looked like two of Watteau's shepherdesses. But my aunt disdained this mixture of elegance and economy. She did not give a thought to what was to take place in the street; her whole mind was absorbed in what was to occur in her drawing-room. Regardless of danger, she put on a dress of yellow silk of the brightest shade, and set off her *chignon* and false braids with a cap adorned with poppies and corn-flowers, above which was fastened a bow of red ribbon, which streamed like a flag from the summit of a tower. This display was intended to do honor to the visitors who merely came for their own convenience. For the most part, they only entered her house with an eye to her balcony: but in order to obtain access to it, they were obliged to pass through the drawing-room, where Donna Clelia herself was stationed to arrest the pas-

sers-by and exact a tribute of politeness no one could refuse, and which, brought to such close terms, every one liberally paid. Never had she, therefore, in a single day reaped a like harvest of new and distinguished acquaintances; never had she received at once so great a number of desirable invitations, for could they do otherwise than requite hospitality with hospitality? My aunt thus had at the beginning of the day one hour of happiness without alloy!

At length the battle began in earnest. To those who have taken part in such combats it is useless to describe the enthusiasm and madness which every one ends by manifesting; to those who have not had the experience it is equally useless to try to give an idea of it. It must be acknowledged, however, that the first volley of *confetti* is by no means very amusing to the recipient, and he is tempted to withdraw ill-humoredly from what seems at first mere rough, childish sport. Then he endeavors to defend himself by retaliating. By degrees the ardor of combat is awakened; he yields to it, he grows furious, and for hours sometimes he persists in returning volley for volley, unmindful of fatigue, and regardless of the blows he receives. One thing is hurled after another—hard *confetti*, fragile eggs, flour, sugar-plums, flowers, and immense bouquets. . . . If the ammunition fails, he throws out of the window whatever comes to hand. He would rather throw himself out than give up the contest!

This sport had been going on for an hour, and we were still in full glee, when the Venetian gondola made its appearance in the street. It was welcomed with shouts and cries of applause from the crowd.

In fact, nothing so splendid of this kind had ever been seen before. It came slowly along, stopping under every balcony. When it arrived before ours, it remained a long time, and a furious combat took place. Notwithstanding the visor that concealed Lorenzo's face, I easily recognized him by his slender, stately form. Lando and Mario looked very well also, but Lorenzo surpassed them all by the grace and ease with which he wore his costume, as well as the skill with which he threw his bouquets to the precise spot he aimed at. He soon recognized me likewise, and threw me a bunch of roses! . . .

Alas! those withered roses. I preserved them a long time in memory of a day that was to end in so strange a manner! . . .

After the gondola had gone entirely out of sight, I concluded to leave the balcony, in order to take some rest while awaiting the return of the brilliant masquerade. This would not be till nightfall, when the gondola was to be illuminated throughout. I had therefore nearly an hour before me in which to repair my strength. But when I entered the drawing-room, I was frightened at the sight which met my eyes. My poor aunt's brilliant toilet had undergone the most disastrous consequences possible to imagine, and I found her so covered with flour and blood that I scarcely recognized her!

In this kind of war, as in all others, nothing is more dangerous than to attract the attention of the enemy. A hat, a ribbon, any dress whatever the least remarkable in its color, instantly becomes the object of universal aim. It seems Donna Clelia, after welcoming her company in the drawing-room, was tempted to go and see in her turn what was taking

place on the battle-field; but no sooner had she stepped her foot on the balcony, no sooner were her poppies visible, and her red ribbons began to wave in the air, than from every balcony, every window, in the neighborhood, there fell on her head such a hail-storm of missiles of all kinds that, in a second, not only had her flowers, ribbons, and *chignon* disappeared under a thick layer of flour, but, having neglected to provide herself with a visor, she had been struck in the very middle of the face by some of the *confetti* I have spoken of, which are merely hard balls of plaster in the centre. No one perceived this in the ardor of the combat, no one left the *milie* to go to her assistance, and she was still in the arm-chair where she had thrown herself, stunned by the violence of the attack! . . .

I sprang towards her, and hastened to bathe her face with cold water. I then saw it was only her nose (a somewhat prominent feature in her face) that had suffered a slight contusion, though sufficient to inundate her laces and yellow dress with blood, so that the damage they sustained, as well as her head-dress, was irreparable! . . .

But in the midst of all this my aunt remained cool and courageous. Like a general wounded on the day of victory, she smiled at the result of her rashness, and, while I was ministering to her wants, she exclaimed:

"It is nothing; no matter! Thanks, Ginevrina mia! *Che bel divertimento!* I never passed such a day in my life! . . . Do you know, the Duchessa di L—— has invited me to play *la pignata** at her house a week from Sunday. And then the gentleman

* A childish amusement resorted to the evening of the first Sunday in Lent, as a kind of supplement to the Carnival.

with H.R.H., the Count of Syracuse, has promised to get me an invitation to one of the amateur comedies. And the gondola—what do you say to that? Didn't your husband look handsome enough for you? . . . How *simpatico* that Lorenzo is! . . . Ah! *figlia mia*, the Madonna has done well for you! . . . I hope she will think of us some day! . . .”

My aunt rambled on in this way while I was trying to repair her disordered attire, after dressing her wounds. This took some time; but I still hesitated about leaving her, though she begged me to return to the balcony and not trouble myself any more about her. I obeyed her at last; but this interruption had put an end to my enthusiastic gayety, and, when I returned to my place, I no longer felt any disposition to resume the sport I found so amusing only a short time before. Besides, it was growing dusk and the combat was slackening, though the noise and confusion in the street increased as the time approached for the return of the gondola. While I was thus standing motionless in the obscurity of one corner of the balcony where we were assembled, I suddenly heard some words from the adjoining balcony of the next house that attracted my attention:

“Valenzano must be fabulously rich, but he is going to ruin at full speed, the dear duke.”

“In the first place, he is really very wealthy,” was the reply; “and when he gains his lawsuit in Sicily, he will be the richest man in this part of Italy. I do not consider his entertaining company, however distinguished it may be, or giving his pretty wife a new set of ornaments now and then, or throwing away a few hundred dollars as he

has done to-day, as an extravagance that will ruin a man of his means.”

“No, of course not, if that were all.”

“What else is there? . . . He used to play high, but they say he never touches a card now.”

The other speaker burst into a loud laugh, and, after a moment's silence, resumed in a lower tone:

“He no longer plays in company, but I assure you *Qui a bu boira* and *Qui a joué jouera*. I should be satisfied with an income equal to what he spends in one evening at *lansquenet* or *baccara* since he stopped playing whist and *écarté* in the drawing-rooms to which he accompanies the duchess.”

Their voices grew still lower, and the few words I heard were so indistinct that I only caught the following:

“But as there is no doubt as to the result of the lawsuit in Sicily, there is no danger of a catastrophe.”

At that moment the uproar in the street became deafening. Shouts and wild applause announced the approach of the gondola, and redoubled in proportion to its nearness. It really presented a fairy-like appearance. It was lit up with a thousand lamps of all colors, and from time to time brilliant rockets were sent up, casting a momentary gleam over the crowd, and then vanishing, leaving everything in obscurity except the dazzling gondola, which proceeded slowly along without stopping this time beneath the balconies. No *confetti* or flowers were thrown; the combat was over. It was now merely a magnificent picturesque spectacle. I saw Lorenzo again, and more distinctly than before, for he had taken off his visor; but he could not see me

in the obscurity of our balcony. He was standing in a group on the deck of the gondola as it went by. They were all dressed in Venetian costumes, which produced an extremely picturesque effect. It was like a living representation of one of Paul Veronese's paintings. I could not take my eyes off so brilliant and extraordinary a spectacle, and the gondola had gone some distance when I suddenly saw Lorenzo (it was really he; I should have known him, even if his face had not at that moment been turned towards the bright light) rapidly ascend the light staging at one end of the gondola, holding in his hand a small bunch of jasmine tied with a white ribbon, which, when he arrived at the top, he threw towards a window in which gleamed a little light. . . . It reached its destination. The window immediately closed, the light disappeared, and Lorenzo descended and was lost in the crowd that thronged the gondola. All this took place so quickly that I could hardly account for the attention with which I watched this little evolution and the degree of vexation it caused me. Lorenzo, in the course of the day, had thrown more than a hundred bouquets of the same kind. Why

was I more curious to know the destination of this one than I had been of the rest? But fatigue and the deafening noise rendered me incapable of reflecting any length of time on what I had just witnessed and what I had heard on the balcony. There was almost immediately a general confusion, for the return of the gondola was the signal for dispersing. I remained till the last to ascertain the condition of my aunt after her accident, and did not leave her till she had promised to go to bed and let the baroness, who willingly accepted the charge, accompany her daughters to the *Festino* at midnight.

Having returned home, I likewise returned to my room, where I threw myself on a sofa, exhausted with fatigue. Lorenzo returned at a later hour. He came up to my room, spoke affectionately, advised me to take some repose, and inquired if I had absolutely decided not to go to San Carlo. I replied that, even if I had intended going, I should be obliged to give it up now. He did not insist, and my eyes were already beginning to close when he embraced me, as he was going away, and said: "Till to-morrow, Ginevra; for the *Festino* will not be over till daylight, you know."

XXVII.

I slept as the young do when suffering from unusual fatigue—that is to say, with a sleep so profound that, when I awoke, I had no idea of the lateness of the hour or where I was, and I felt as completely rested as if I had slept the entire night. The sound of carriage-wheels on the gravel of the avenue facing my room had roused me from my slumbers, and I now heard steps and the sound of voices in a subdued tone in the

chamber adjoining mine. My door soon opened, and Ottavia entered, moving cautiously, as if she supposed me asleep. But as soon as I spoke, I heard a silvery laugh behind her, and, to my great surprise, Stella made her appearance. She had on a black domino with the hood thrown back, and in her hand she held two masks and another domino like her own.

"You see I was right, Ottavia," she

exclaimed. "I was sure we should find her awake, and, what is still better, she is dressed! That is fortunate! Now, Ginevra, you must absolutely consent to indulge in the pleasure of spending an hour with me at San Carlo—only an hour! Here, look at the clock; it is half-past twelve. I promise to bring you back before two to continue the fine nap I have disturbed."

I rubbed my eyes and looked at her, without comprehending a thing she proposed.

"Come, come, Ginevra!" she continued, "wake up, I tell you, and listen to what I say. In the first place, you must know we have had no supper or company at our house to-night. My uncle had an attack of the gout and went to bed at nine o'clock, and I played cards with my aunt till midnight. But just as we were both going to our rooms, she all at once remembered—perhaps touched by my good-humor—how much she used to enjoy going to the *Festini*, and told me, of her own accord, it was not too late to go, if I knew of any friend to accompany me. It occurred to me at once, Ginevra, it would be very amusing for you to go and quiz *il Signor Duca* a little. He is absolutely sure you are in bed fast asleep. You can tell him a thousand things nobody knows but yourselves, which will set him wild with amazement and curiosity. You can acknowledge everything to-morrow, and he will be the first to declare it an excellent joke. As for me, I am not sorry to have an opportunity of telling your august brother a few truths in return for certain remarks about my exuberant gayety and levity not quite to my liking. . . . Come, come, Ginevra, we must not lose any time. Consent, and I will tell you the rest on the way."

It is useless to enumerate the additional arguments she used. The result was, she not only triumphed over my repugnance, but she succeeded in exciting a lively desire to meet Lorenzo in disguise. It seemed to me I could say many things I should not dare breathe a word of to his face, and I could thus relieve my mind of the two or three incidents that had troubled it within twenty-four hours.

Stella saw I was ready to yield.

"Quick! quick! Ottavia, help me to put on her domino, and above all, put back her hair so it cannot be seen. The least curl peeping out of her hood would be sufficient to betray her. Now, let us see; as we shall have to separate on entering the hall, we must wear something not too conspicuous which will enable us to find each other in the crowd of black dominos. Let me hunt for something."

She looked around, and soon discovered a large basket, in which remained a number of small bouquets tied with ribbons of all colors, prepared for the contests that morning.

"The very thing," said she. And while Ottavia was executing her orders and concealing my hair, Stella selected two small bunches of flowers, one tied with red, and the other with white, ribbon.

"Nothing could be better," said she. "The flowers are alike; the ribbons alone different. Look! see where I have put my badge. Here is yours. Put it in the same place, on the left side near the shoulder."

. . . But when I saw that the little bouquet she gave me was of *jasmine tied with a white ribbon*, the emotion I felt was extreme. I did not manifest it, however, for I knew if I told Stella the reason, she would burst into laughter, and ask if I was

going to worry myself about all the bouquets my husband had thrown by the dozen that day upon all the balconies on the Toledo, and if I intended to bring him to an account for them. I therefore made no comment on this singular coincidence; but while I was fastening the bouquet on, as Stella had directed, I suddenly recollect, I know not why, it was by giving Lorenzo a sprig of jasmine I pledged myself to be his for life!

Having completed my preparations, with the exception of my mask, which I carried in my hand to put on at the last moment, I drew up my hood and followed Stella, escorted to the foot of the staircase by my good old Ottavia, who, though accustomed to the follies of the Carnival, shook her head as she saw me depart, and looked at me with a more anxious expression than usual. Was she thinking of the evening when she saw me set out for my first ball—of fearful memory? Did she recall my mother's anxiety? And did she remember to beg her to watch over her child and pray for her, as she did then? . . .

As we approached San Carlo, I was again seized with fear, and regretted having yielded to Stella's entreaties.

"What will become of us alone in the crowd with no one to protect us?" said I.

"Our masks are a sufficient protection, especially to-night. There will be so large a number of ladies of rank at the *Festino* that no one will venture to say a word to us that surpasses the bounds of pleasantry. There would be too much danger of addressing some one who would resent it. As to our masks, you need not be anxious. The rules of the *bals masqués* absolutely

forbid any one's touching them, and these rules are respected even by those who do not respect any other. But, apropos of masks, it is time to put yours on."

I still hesitated. But at last, as I was on the point of descending from the carriage, I decided to fasten my mask on, and I tremblingly followed Stella, or rather, she took my arm and drew me along.

My first feeling, on finding myself in such a crowd, was one of inexpressible terror. I was seized with an invincible embarrassment and a sensation of suffocation so painful that it was with all the difficulty in the world I kept myself from tearing off the mask that seemed to hinder me from breathing. But Stella laughingly encouraged me in a whisper, and by degrees I became accustomed to the deafening sound of the music, the exclamations and resonant voices on every side, as well as the sight of the dominos and masks of all colors in circulation around us. She led me on some distance, cautioning me in a low tone to make no reply, and making none herself, to the observations here and there addressed the two "fair masks" who were gliding through the crowd. At length we came to a pillar, against which we leaned, and she whispered:

"Let this place be our rendezvous. You will certainly see Lorenzo pass by in a few moments. As for me, I do not see your brother anywhere, but yonder is Landolfo. I will amuse myself by talking nonsense with him. Do not be afraid, and, above all, do not lose your badge, or I shall be unable to find you. I will be careful of mine also. If I arrive here first, I will wait for you. You must do the same."

She disappeared as she uttered these words, and I stood still for some minutes, looking around with uneasiness and terror caused by the impossibility of persuading myself I was not seen and recognized by everybody. But after three or four gentlemen of my acquaintance passed by with a mere glance of indifference, I began to take courage, and finally became sufficiently cool to consider what I should do and the means of attaining my object.

I began by looking around on all sides, but for some time it was in vain. I could not see Lorenzo anywhere, and had decided to leave my post in order to search for him in some other part of the hall, when all at once I saw him some distance off, coming in my direction. He was walking slowly along, looking around with a certain attention, as if he was also in search of some one. We were separated by the crowd, and it was not easy to reach him. I advanced a few steps, however, and at that instant, but only for an instant, there was an opening in the crowd which enabled him, in his turn, to see me. I saw a flash of joy on his face. He recognized me, it was evident; by what means I did not ask. I no longer remembered my intention of mystifying him. I sprang towards him, and he towards me. I passed my arm through his, still too much excited by my previous fears and my joy at finding him to utter a word. . . .

A moment passed—a single moment, brief and terrible, . . . for he spoke—yes, at once, and with vehemence, with passion! . . . But . . . it was not to me! . . . No, it was to her he expected to meet. I heard his lips murmur the detested name that had not met my ear since I left Paris! . . .

I was so astounded that I gave

him time to say what I ought not to have heard, what I did not wish to hear! . . . Then . . . I know not what impulse I yielded to, for I lost the power of reflection—I abruptly withdrew my arm from his, and fell back with so quick and violent a movement that the crowd opened a moment to make way for me, and then closed, completely separating me from him. . . . I tore off the flowers and ribbon I wore, and threw them on the ground. I could not now be distinguished from the other black dominos around me. But I was no longer afraid. I cared for nothing now but to get away—to fly as fast as possible from so horrible a place. I hurried along in such a wild, rapid way that every one looked at me with surprise, and stood aside for me to pass. I thus succeeded in leaving the hall and reaching the passage, where I was obliged to stop to take breath. The passers-by addressed me, but I heard nothing but the words that still resounded in my ears. I was conscious of nothing but a fearful anguish and the rapid beating of my heart.

While standing there, all at once . . . O merciful heavens! . . . I saw a lady pass only a few steps off. . . . She was of my height, and, like me, wore a black domino with a sprig of jasmine tied with a white ribbon, similar to the one I had just torn off, and doubtless the same my eyes had followed a few hours before! I recognized her at once, and imagined I saw through her mask the sinister gleam of two large blue eyes! She traversed the passage and entered the hall, where she disappeared. I trembled fearfully from head to foot, my sight grew dim, my strength began to fail me. I felt as if I should die on the spot

if I did not take off the mask that was suffocating me, and yet I was still conscious I ought to keep it on at all hazards. I threw around a glance of despair, hoping to see Stella, and forgetting she would not be able to recognize me, even if she thought of looking for me so far from the spot where she left me. What torture! Great God! . . . My strength was gone, my voice failed me, I felt my knees give way, when, O unlooked-for happiness! I saw Mario pass by. The stifled cry I uttered died away on my lips before it could reach his ear, but he saw the effort I made, he felt my hand on his arm, and stopped. He began to address me in the customary way on such occasions, but I made no reply. I had recovered strength enough, however, to draw him towards the door, and he unresistingly followed my lead; but, as we were going out, he stopped me with an air of surprise, and said:

"I am ready to follow you wherever you wish, fair mask, but do you know yourself where you wish to go?"

I was only able to incline my head as a sign of affirmation, and he suffered me to lead him into the street. As soon as we were out of doors, I tore off my mask, and found strength enough to say:

"It is I, Mario. Help me to get away from this detestable place!"

"Ginevra!" exclaimed he, drawing me along several steps to look at my face by the light of the torches not far off. He seemed frightened at my looks. My face was convulsed and lividly pale.

"Good heavens, sister!" said he gravely, "what has happened? How is it you are alone in this place at such an hour? Where is Lorenzo? Shall I go for him?"

"No, no! Oh! no," I exclaim-

ed with anguish. "For pity's sake, Mario, be silent. Help me to get away, I say. That is all I ask. Do this, and ask me no questions."

His face darkened. He silently took hold of my arm, and led me to the place where he had left his carriage. I entered it, and was on the point of going away without another word when I bethought myself of Stella. I hesitated, however, to expose her to his sarcastic comments, and perhaps to the suspicions I saw were already excited in my brother's distrustful mind, and said in a supplicating tone:

"One favor more, Mario, which I am sure you will no more refuse your sister than any other lady. I did not come here alone."

At these words his face assumed an expression which I answered with a smile of disdain.

"Do you suppose, Mario, if I did not come here with Lorenzo, I would accept the escort of any other gentleman?" I stopped a moment, at once irritated and impatient, but finally continued:

"The fact is, Mario, if you must know it, it was he, it was Lorenzo himself, I came to see. I wished to play a joke on him and mystify him a little, by way of amusing myself."

I think my smile must have been frightful as I said this, for my brother looked anxiously at me, though he seemed satisfied with my explanation.

"But I have been punished," I continued, "terribly punished. . . . I failed in my object, . . . and thought I should die in the crowd."

I could say no more. The tears I could not repress choked me. Mario at once softened.

"I understand, sister—the noise, heat, and so forth were overpowering. Those who go to a *bal mas-*

quel for the first time often experience this, but another time it will not happen."

"God preserve me from ever going to another!" said I in a low tone. "But I was about to say, Mario, that the person, the lady, who came with me is probably looking for me by this time. Search for her. Her domino is like mine, and you will know her by a sprig of jasmine tied with a red ribbon."

"I saw such a domino not long ago on Lando's arm."

"It was she. Find her, and tell her not to be anxious; that I was ill, and could not wait for her. That is all. Thanks, Mario. One

word more, however. As I did not succeed with regard to Lorenzo, I do not wish him to know anything about it."

He made a sign that he understood me, and closed the door of the carriage, which soon took me home. Ottavia, who alone sat up for me, was alarmed at seeing me return in such a condition. I repeated the account I had given Mario, and had no difficulty in convincing her I was ill. The change in my face was sufficient to prove it; but what was this pallor, great God! in comparison with the change that had come over my life within the hour that had scarcely elapsed?

xxviii.

This time the thunderbolt had really fallen on my head! Many times had I heard it rumbling afar off, and once I thought myself fatally injured; but after a few stormy days, calmness was restored, the blue sky became visible, and the sun once more diffused the light and warmth of renewed confidence and happiness. The desire of being happy seconded my effort to become so. And, as I have remarked, the liveliness, buoyancy, and love of pleasure natural to the young, as well as the beauty of Naples and the influence of its climate, all tended to surround me with an atmosphere at once enervating and intoxicating. But now, in an instant, without any warning, all my hopes were crushed, annihilated, for ever at an end!

"Should Lorenzo become treacherous, unfaithful, and untrue to his word, could I continue to love him? What would become of me in such a case?" Such were the questions I once asked myself, and

they were the sincere cry of my heart.

Now all this was realized. A person more treacherous, more deceitful, more untrue than he it seemed impossible to find. Everything now became clear. The words I heard, so plainly interpreted by the instinct they awakened and that had already warned me so strangely, enabled me to comprehend everything. Whether there was any good reason or not for his frequent absence, it was evident he had always met her. It was therefore from these interviews he had derived the cheerfulness and good-humor that apparently made him enjoy so much the comfort and splendor he afterwards came to participate in with me. Once—who can tell for what reason?—he had delayed going. It was then, probably, she came herself to meet him, not foreseeing, or he either, it would be before my very eyes! . . .

Even at the present time it would perhaps agitate me and dis-

turb the tranquillity of my soul, should I dwell too long on the thoughts which then overwhelmed me, and from which I derived the conviction that I no longer loved Lorenzo. But I suffered from the deadly chill his treachery had struck to my heart. I would rather have experienced the torment of jealousy than the chill of indifference. To suffer from that would still have been life. To suffer as I did was like being paralyzed, petrified, dead.

Women more generous, more courageous, and more devoted than I, had, I was aware, won back such inconstant hearts, and found happiness once more in the sweetest of victories; but their example occurred to me without producing any impression. I was not in a condition to be influenced by it. My aimless life had resulted in the almost complete prostration of my strength of volition. In this condition I could neither suffer with courage, nor act with wisdom, nor resist temptation with any energy of will. . . .

O, my God! it is with my face prostrate in the dust I desire to write the pages that are to follow. It is not without hesitation I continue my account. But the remembrance of thy mercy prevails over everything, and effaces the very recollection of the faults and follies that serve to make it manifest! Like our divine poet wandering in the mazes of that gloomy forest which is the image of life, I, in my turn, attempt

"To discourse of what there good beset;
All else will I relate discovered there."*

Mario, Stella, and Ottavia were the sole confidants of my secret, and they kept it faithfully. Lo-

renzo had the less reason for suspecting I had been to the ball when, returning home at six o'clock in the morning, he learned I had had a violent attack of fever in the night, and was not able to rise. There was no deception in this. It was not a mere pretext for keeping my chamber, but the too natural consequence of the terrible excitement of the night I had passed.

Lorenzo came several times to know how I was, and manifested more apparent affection than usual; and yet once or twice, though perhaps my imagination deceived me, I thought I saw something like embarrassment or uneasiness in his face. I was, however, too ill all the morning to observe him closely or make any reply to what he said.

Towards evening I felt better, and, though still weak, I got up. Lorenzo came to see if anything serious was likely to result from my indisposition, and, being reassured on this point, he went out as usual, leaving me alone with Stella, who had spent part of the day at my bedside, though I had not been able to talk with her any more than with him. Her face was as grave that day as it was usually smiling. Stella's cheerfulness resulted from her complete lack of egotism. She regarded the happiness of others as a treasure from which she took all she needed for herself; and was happy, therefore, through sympathy. It was, so to speak, a reflected happiness. Admirable disposition! Incapable of exacting anything in view of her own lot, or of envying that of others, she was a delightful friend in times of prosperity, and, at the same time, a devoted adherent in misfortune, and the sweet, compassionate confidant

*Carey's *Dante*.

of others' sorrows. My disappearance the evening before, the condition in which she found me in the morning, the incoherent words I uttered, prepared her for something serious, and she knew beforehand I, of all people in the world, would not hesitate to tell her the truth. In fact, as soon as we were left alone in a small sitting-room next my chamber, I gave her for the first time a full account of all that had taken place at Paris, as well as the night before. She listened without interrupting me, and, after I ended, remained silent for some time.

"This is indeed a good lesson for me," said she at length. "I am cured for life, I hope, of a folly like that I committed last night."

"What folly do you allude to?"

"Why, that of coming here and persuading you to go to a place where you learned what you might for ever have remained ignorant of."

"And continue to be taken in, deceived, and blinded, to live in an atmosphere of deception, hypocrisy, and lies, to love what no longer merits affection? No, Stella, no; do not regret that, thanks to you, it is no longer the case. Were I to suffer even a thousand times more, were I to die of anguish, as I thought I should on the spot when I saw that woman pass by, I should be glad the veil had been torn from my eyes. I can no longer be happy, it is true. My happiness is ruined beyond repair, but I love truth better than happiness."

"And do you think," said Stella after a fresh pause, "that you can never forgive Lorenzo?"

"He must, at least, desire it, as you will acknowledge, and this is precisely what will never happen."

"Why not?"

"Because I know Lorenzo. If I utter a reproach, it is he who thinks

he has something to forgive. He really obeys no law but the impulse that happens to predominate. It is not in his nature, doubtless, to show me openly any ill treatment, but he would break my heart without any scruple in order to gratify his inclinations. I have no doubt he thinks he has acted with great delicacy, because he has taken pains to conceal the base course he has pursued; and when he finds out I have discovered it, it is he who will think he has a right to be angry. That will be the result. What room is there for forgiveness in such a tissue of falseness?"

"What can I say to you? It will be no consolation to hear there are many women who have husbands like him. It is sad to feel there is nothing in the world so rare as happiness. Nevertheless, it is true, and, for my part, it has often consoled me for having had so little in my life. And had I been happy in the beginning; who could tell what the future had in reserve for me?"

"And you have never thought of marrying again? You can content yourself with a life devoid of happiness, as well as of suffering?"

She smiled.

"My life is not so exempt from suffering as you may suppose. Neither is it devoid of happiness while I have my Angiolina. As for marrying again, I have never happened to meet a person who inspired me with the least desire of that kind, and I imagine I never shall."

"It is certain, however, if you wish to marry, you would only have the trouble of choosing."

"Perhaps among men not one of whom pleases me. Who knows how it would be if I took it into my head to fancy some one? But let us leave my affairs and return to you. Tell me, are you sure Lorenzo has

not discovered you were at the ball?"

"Yes, I am certain he has not. If he had any suspicion, he would not conceal it from me. Besides, he found me too ill at his return to conceive such an idea. And yet . . ."

"Well, go on."

"Well, I noticed something that seemed to indicate he is not so sure as he was yesterday of my utter ignorance of all he has thought proper to hide from me."

"I agree with you, Ginevra. And shall I tell you what I think?"

"Tell me."

"That he supposes me to be the mask he addressed by mistake, and does me the honor of supposing I have denounced him."

"What an idea! . . . Why should he suppose it was you?"

"Oh! by that aberration of mind common to gentlemen who frequent masked balls and persist in thinking they are right every time they are mistaken."

"But once more: Why should he suppose you were at the ball? Your secret has been as well kept as mine, I imagine."

"Not quite. In the first place, I spoke to several persons. And when Mario came to deliver your message, I could not repress an exclamation of surprise, which betrayed me, not only to your brother, but to Lando, on whose arm I was then leaning. I do not know whether it was he or not who spread the report, but it has certainly been whispered around that I attended the *Festino*. Lorenzo has taken the idea I have mentioned into his head, and of course supposes what I know has been communicated to you, or will be. This is what I have been wishing to say to you."

My faithful Ottavia now made her

appearance to warn me it was time to retire. Stella left me, and, after her departure, I began to reflect on her conjecture and consider what reply I should make, should Lorenzo question me on the subject. I was far from suspecting the means he would adopt to anticipate the scene he foresaw.

I was alone the following morning when I saw him enter, calm, smiling, and self-possessed, as if there was no actual or possible cloud between us. He spoke of my health, and, satisfied that I was really better, proceeded to more indifferent subjects, and then suddenly, with an assurance the recollection of which still astonishes me, he said:

"Apropos, Ginevra, the Marchesa di Villanera has been in Naples several days."

I turned pale.

"Oh! do not be alarmed," said he. "I have not the slightest intention of asking you to receive her. I remember too well the sentiments you expressed on this point at Paris. No, I wish instead to let you know I am going to escort her to Milan myself, and shall remain there till after the Carnavalone.*"

My heart gave a violent bound. I could not utter a word, but the surprise that rendered me dumb enabled me to be calm, and, when I finally recovered my voice, I said:

"You are at liberty to go where you please, Lorenzo. It is a liberty, moreover, you have always had, and have already made use of, and I cannot conceive why *this time* (I emphasized these words) you feel obliged to tell me the precise object of your journey."

"Because I wish to be frank with you this time, and I should have been so before had I not remem-

* A prolongation of the Carnival peculiar to Milan, where it lasts four days longer than elsewhere.

bered your reproaches, and wished to spare you the occasion of renewing them. Besides, I no longer have it in my power to prevent your jealousy, or forbid the conjectures you think proper to indulge in."

"Lorenzo!" I said almost in a scream, and I was on the point of giving utterance to all that filled my heart to overflowing when, with the stern, imperious accent he knew how to assume, though without rudeness or the least violence, he stopped me.

"Not another word, Ginevra; not one. I beg, out of love for yourself. Do not destroy your future happiness in a moment of anger! There are some things I *will not* listen to, and which, for your own interest as well as mine, I forbid your saying!"

I had no chance to reply, for he took my hand before I could prevent it, and said:

"*Au revoir*, Ginevra. I hope, at my return, to find you as calm and reasonable as I desire."

He kissed my hand and left the room.

The state in which he left me cannot be described. I need not say how incapable I was of reflection, of effort, or any struggle whatever against the feelings it was natural I should have. I felt outraged as it seemed to me no woman had ever been. My mind lost its clearness, my judgment was impaired, and for some hours I was wild.

After Lorenzo's departure, it seemed impossible to remain alone. I could not endure inaction and repose for an instant. I ordered my carriage for a drive—not, as usual, with Stella and in a direction where I should find solitude, but, on the contrary, where I was most sure of meeting a crowd. I smilingly re-

turned the numerous salutations I received, and, instead of appearing troubled or downcast, I looked around with eager interest, as if hoping to find some means of escaping from myself and leaving my troubles forever behind me.

I returned home as late as possible, and found Stella awaiting me. She had been disappointed at my not calling for her, and had come to ascertain the reason. Finding I had gone out, she was surprised I had forgotten her, but was still more so when I told her I should go to the ball at the French ambassador's that evening. I seldom went anywhere alone, and it was only the day before I had told her decidedly I should never attend another ball. Her eyes were fastened on me with a look of sympathy, as she said:

"Poor Ginevra!"

I begged her in a hasty, irritated manner not to waste any pity on me, and then added:

"To-morrow, if you like, we will talk about it; but not to-day, I beg. Let us give our whole thoughts to the ball. You will go, I hope."

"Yes, if you have really decided to go."

"That is right. Good-by till this evening, then."

Thus dismissed, she left me, and I summoned my waiting-maid to do what I had never required before. I ordered everything I was to wear to be spread out before me. I examined my diamonds and pearls, and gave the most minute directions about the way I intended to wear them. I then began my toilet, though long before the time, and was as long about it as possible. So many women, thought I, seem to take infinite pleasure in creating a sensation when they enter a ball-room, receiving compli-

ments and homage on all sides, why should I not try this means of diversion as well as other people? I am beautiful, there is no doubt; very beautiful, they say. Why should I not endeavor to excite admiration? Why not become vain and coquettish in my turn?

In a word, the hour had arrived spoken of in the first part of this story, as the reader will recollect—the hour when, for the first and only time after my mother's death and the tragical end of Flavio Aldini, the lively vanity of girlhood, roused by irritation, jealousy, and grief, broke through the restraint which an ineffaceable remembrance and the grace of God had imposed upon it, and for once I saw what I should doubtless have been without the divine, mysterious influence that warred within me against myself. I had corresponded to this grace, it is true, by my sincere, determined will, but my volition had now become feeble and uncertain, and I set out for the ball after thus carefully preparing in advance the draught of vanity I wished to become intoxicated with.

I had the satisfaction I desired in all its plenitude. I was handsome, stylish, and elegantly dressed; and yet all this is not the chief cause of a lady's success in society. Let those who think so be persuaded of their error. People accord to these gifts a certain respectful admiration, but such a success as I obtained that evening—brilliant, demonstrative, and universal—does

not depend on the beauty a person is endowed with, but on the wish to please she manifests, and this is why the victory is sometimes so strangely awarded! . . . I was changed in no respect, except in the disposition with which I attended the ball, and yet I did not seem to be the same person. I was surrounded as I had never been before. I excited a kind of enthusiasm. I received compliments that evening I had never listened to before. And when, contrary to my usual custom, I announced my intention to dance, everybody contended for my hand. But, as the evening advanced, I grew weary of it all, and began to feel my fatigued, feverish gayety subside. When I rose to waltz for the last time, it was with an effort, and, after my partner led me back to my seat, my smile vanished, and a cold sense of my wretchedness came over me with un pitying grasp. "All is useless," a secret, sorrowful voice seemed to say; "you must awaken to the reality of your sufferings . . ."

At that moment I heard beside me a familiar, half-forgotten voice—calm, sonorous, and sweet, but now somewhat sarcastic:

"I cannot aspire to the honor of dancing with the Duchessa di Valenzano, but I hope she will not refuse to recognize me."

I eagerly turned around, and there beside me I saw the person who uttered these words was Gilbert de Kergy.

XXIX.

During the week following the ball a most unexpected change took place in my feelings—a change that at once afforded me so much comfort that I did not hesitate to

think and say that heaven had, in the hour of my greatest need, sent me a friend.

It must be acknowledged, however, the hour when Gilbert de

Kergy so suddenly made his appearance was not exactly that in which I should have expected an extraordinary intervention of divine Providence in my behalf. I ought even to say that the first feeling I experienced at seeing him again was one of extreme confusion at exhibiting myself under so different an aspect from that he had known me before, and, in fact, so different from that which was usually mine. This confusion, added to my fatigue and the painful reaction and disgust which inevitably follow such intoxication as I had voluntarily indulged in, sent me home in a totally different frame of mind from that I was in when I left. Two hours before, I beheld myself in the mirror with great complacency; but when I now saw myself in this same glass resplendent with jewels and flowers, I turned away with displeasure, and do not think I should have felt the least regret had I at that moment been told I wore this brilliant array for the last time.

I hastily took off my diamonds and pearls, and changed my dress; and when at length I found myself alone, face to face with the thoughts I had vainly tried to escape from, for the first time since my interview with Lorenzo a flood of tears came to my relief. The nature of the distraction I had sought now appeared in all its vanity, and the shame I felt was increased by the remembrance of Gilbert's smile and the sarcastic accent of his words. It was not in this way he had addressed me at Paris. This was not the grave, respectful manner, so different from that of any other person, which had so touched and flattered me then. The contrast made me blush, and I longed to meet him again, that I might efface as com-

pletely as possible the impression now left on his mind.

I longed also to inquire about his mother and Diana. In short, a thousand recollections, as foreign as possible to everything that surrounded me now, came to my mind and diverted it more effectually than any amusement could have done from the cause of my present troubles. I slept more calmly than I should have supposed after so exciting a day, and the following morning when I awoke, though my first thoughts were of all I had suffered the day before, I could not forget the pleasant event that had also occurred to lighten my burden.

Gilbert had asked at what o'clock he could see me, and, at the appointed hour, I was ready to receive him. I anticipated his arrival with pleasure, and felt no embarrassment, except that which resulted from the recollection of the previous evening. He came punctually, and, after an observant look and a few minutes' conversation, he became the same he once was; which reconciled me a little to myself. We talked about Paris, the Hôtel de Kergy, and a thousand other things, and his conversation, as formerly, absorbed my attention, diverted my mind from my troubles, and awoke an interest in a multitude of things unconnected with him or myself.

As he was on the point of leaving, he smiled, as he said with something of the sarcastic tone of the evening before:

"I suppose, madame, I cannot flatter myself with the hope of finding you at home, at least as long as the Carnival lasts."

"Allow me to undeceive you," I hastened to reply with a blush. "Whatever you may have thought

last evening, I am not fond of dancing. I very seldom go to a ball of my own accord, and am sure I shall not attend another this year. This *soirée* was every way an exceptional one, as far as I was concerned."

"Really! I hope you will not think me too bold if I acknowledge that what you say affords me pleasure."

He said this in so frank and natural a way that I was restored to my ease, and laughingly replied:

"You prefer my former manner? Well, Monsieur de Kergy, I acknowledge you are right, and let me assure you it was my true one."

As he was going away, I expressed the hope of seeing him again, and from that time not a day passed in which I did not meet him. When I had no engagement elsewhere, I usually spent my evenings at home, where I invariably received a certain number of friends who were in the habit of meeting in my drawing-room. These *soirées* were not interrupted when Lorenzo was absent from home, but the number of those who composed the little circle was more restricted. Stella, of course, never failed to come, and the other *habitués* consisted of friends and some of the foreigners who lived in Naples, or were there temporarily, and preferred a quiet circle to gayer society.

On the first story, to the right and left, were two long, lateral terraces, united by a third which extended all along the front of the house. These terraces surmounted a Greek portico, whose colonnades surrounded a small square court, like those of Pompeii, into which looked all the windows of the ground floor. All that part of the house, with the exception of Lorenzo's studio, was reserved for large parties, while the first story

was used for ordinary reunions. We therefore generally assembled in an upper drawing-room, which opened on one of the lateral terraces; and from the day I allude to Gilbert regularly formed a part of the little coterie which met there every evening. His influence was speedily felt, and the atmosphere once more changed around me as at Paris, and this change seemed even more beneficial than before. Every one felt Gilbert's influence more or less. He possessed the enviable faculty of elevating the minds of others above their usual level, and of communicating to them the interest he felt in whatever he was conversing about. Not that he tried to introduce subjects he had made a special study of, or to advance theories or opinions that first excited wonder and afterwards wearied the minds of those on whom he wished to impose them. On the contrary, he seemed to take an interest in everything except what was low, repulsive, and absolutely trivial. But subjects of this kind were rather not thought of than avoided intentionally in these conversations, which were lively, natural, unrestrained, and agreeable, and at the same time different from those I took a part in anywhere else.

It soon became evident that this addition to our daily reunions added singularly to their charm. Never had the annual influx of foreigners been so favorable to us. Stella, I observed, sometimes looked pensive while listening to him, and one day she remarked to me she had never seen any one like M. de Kergy. As for me, I felt the beneficial influence of his society, and welcomed it without analyzing the enjoyment that had come so opportunely to divert me from my pre-

sent trials and renew the influences of the past, which seemed the best in my life.

The lively indignation that filled my heart every time I thought of Lorenzo's absence and its cause continued to be felt. I bitterly compared the world of perfidy and deceit he had forced me to know, with that to which Gilbert belonged. I thought of the hopes I once had, and how irreparably they had been deceived, and these reflections were my only danger at the time I am speaking of.

The Carnival was now over, but it excited no surprise that Lorenzo wished to prolong it by remaining at Milan during the Carnavalone. No one even seemed to think it extraordinary he had gone there with a beautiful woman who was returning without any escort. Naples, as I have said, was not a place where evil reports were readily credited. People were not much in the habit of discussing the deeds and actions of others. Rather than give themselves up to conjectures common elsewhere, they would make a sign, by putting the hand to the chin, to signify a thing was nothing to them or concerned them but little. But this charitable indifference did not exactly spring from love of their neighbor, and sometimes went so far, it must be confessed, as to be scandalized at nothing.

I soon perceived, therefore, that though the true cause of Lorenzo's absence was known to almost everybody, and though his course inspired a universal sympathy and compassion for me which wounded my pride, it by no means excited against him the indignation that at least would have somewhat avenged me.

Mario alone appeared grave and

anxious, but Lando, who was not slow in discovering the real state of the case, confined himself to some characteristic remarks which would have appeared insulting had I not learned never to take anything he said seriously, or attach any importance to it. One evening, however, finding himself by chance near me in the drawing-room, he said in his incorrigible way:

"If I were in your place, I would punish that dear Lorenzo in the way he deserves. Unfortunately, you are not the woman for that, I know. And, after all, you need not take the trouble, for I can assure you the fair Milanese herself will be sure to avenge you."

I did not utter a word in reply to this language, which wounded all the pride and self-respect in my nature, and, at the same time, excited a torrent of bitterness and contempt for Lorenzo. I thought at that moment of the fearful vow Livia once spoke of, and asked myself if he, this perjured partner of my life, did not make this vow as well as I. By what law, then, was I bound to it, when he had chosen to be free?

I abruptly turned away from Lando as he said this, and left the drawing-room, where we happened to be alone.

The fineness of the weather and some indications of activity in Mt. Vesuvius had drawn all the company that evening out on the terrace. I went out as if intending to join them, but I did nothing of the kind. On the contrary, I sought a place apart, where I could enjoy in peace the serene brilliancy of the heavens, and took a seat overlooking the garden and commanding a view of the Villa Reale, the bay, and the long line of mountains be-

yond. It was one of those incomparable evenings in spring-time when all you see or hear, and the very air you breathe, at once softens, enchant, and predisposes the heart to melancholy. I had thrown over my white dress a large veil of black lace, which I drew up over my head; and, thus protected from the scarcely perceptible dampness of the night, I gave myself up without restriction to my feelings of admiration, as well as the sadness, indignation, and bitterness that filled my heart. Afar off on the sombre azure of the cloudless heavens streamed a reddish flame whose brilliancy formed a strong contrast with the trembling, silvery light the growing moon cast over the waters of the sea. It was one of those awakenings of Vesuvius, the fearful but magnificent spectacle of which is always regarded at Naples with a pleasure that greatly surpasses the anxiety it would be natural to feel at the probable consequences of a new eruption.

All my guests were at that moment at the end of the terrace, where they could have a full view of the flaming crater. But I was by no means disposed to follow their example. I remained in the seat I had taken, my face uplifted and my eyes gazing into the blue, mysterious depths, which seemed to direct my thoughts to something far beyond the visible, starry heavens. I know not how long I had been in this attitude when I perceived Gilbert, who had been on the other side of the terrace, now standing before me.

"May I have a seat here, madame," said he, "or do you prefer continuing your reverie alone?"

"Oh! no; remain. It is better for me to talk than to dream."

"And yet, to judge from your

looks while thus absorbed, your dreams must have been delightful. I longed to participate in them."

"I know not whether they were delightful or otherwise, but they were commonplace and true. Alas! I was thinking that the heavens are as beautiful as the earth is sad."

"Sad? . . . Yes, without doubt, but likewise very beautiful at times, something like the sky above our heads, so glorious to-night, but which does not always look as it does now."

"But the clouds pass away, and the sky again appears in its unchangeable beauty; whereas . . ."

"Whereas, a single day is sometimes sufficient to render our lives totally different from what they were before. Yes, you are right," said he.

He was silent for an instant, and then resumed with a smile:

"But these gloomy thoughts do not always prevail. It was very far from the case the evening I first saw you in Naples."

"Oh! never speak again of that evening, Monsieur de Kergy, I conjure you," I exclaimed with a warmth I could not repress. "Have I not already told you that I was wretched, infatuated, desperate? . . ."

I stopped short, confused at what had escaped me. I saw his expression of surprise, and noticed again the look of sympathy and emotion he had shown at Paris, as I wept while listening to Diana's music—a look that silently asked me the cause of my tears. Alas! the day I last visited the Hôtel de Kergy was that on which the sadness that now wholly surrounded me first cast its shadow over my path. But I did not wish to betray what I felt now, any more than I did then, and I instantly regretted

the words I had just uttered. I think Gilbert perceived it.

"I assure you," said he after a moment, as if I had never spoken, "notwithstanding the brilliancy of your attire, you were far less imposing in my eyes than you are at this moment; and yet I am going to show a boldness I certainly should not have thought of manifesting that evening, to which I shall never allude again."

"What do you mean?"

"You seemed that night to belong to a world whose manners and language I was ignorant of, and where I felt more out of place and uninitiated than a savage. I could not have said such a word then. I hardly dared look at you afar off; whereas—but you will think me presumptuous."

"No, say what you were going to."

"Well, then, you seem now, on the contrary, as you did at Paris, a member of the world I live in—an inhabitant, a queen if you like, or a sister, perhaps, whose language I speak, as you can mine. That is why . . ."

He hesitated an instant, and then continued with an accent of truth and simplicity that prevented his manner from appearing singular: "That is why I venture—and it is showing myself very bold—yes, venture, madame, to consider myself worthy of being your friend, and, should you deign to accord me this

title, I think I can safely promise never to show myself unworthy of it."

What reply I made I hardly know, but what I am only too sure of is that these words were welcome to a heart at once crushed and embittered as mine then was. The void occasioned by Lorenzo's treachery caused a suffering like that of intense hunger. My dignity, even more than my conscience, forbade my alleviating this hunger by giving vent to my grievances; nor was I tempted to do so. But was there any reason why I should refuse myself the solace of such a friendship as Gilbert now offered me? Had I any other duty now, with regard to Lorenzo, than to show a respect he had not manifested to the tie that united us? Could not Gilbert, as he had just offered, be truly my brother in heart and soul? Was he not different, as Stella acknowledged, from any one I had ever met? And was I not myself in a position without parallel?

I pass over the remainder of my reflections in silence, merely remarking here that if all the women who believe themselves to be in an exceptional position could be counted, they would be astonished, I imagine, to find their number so great, and would perhaps have to renounce some of the privileges they lay claim to by virtue of the singularity of their destiny.

xxx.

THE portrait of Gilbert I have drawn is not incorrect. He was as noble as I have represented him, and it is certain that, in speaking to me as he did that day, he was very far from the thought of laying a snare for me, or even for himself. Whether he was absolutely sincere or not I cannot say, but probably as much so as I, at least during the few first days after this conversation. Thanks to the method of reasoning I have given above, and which I thought original, it seemed to me that this frequent intercourse with a man unusually superior to any one I had ever known, and who, very far from addressing me any silly flattery, almost invariably appealed to all that was highest in my nature, and, without alluding to the cause of my troubles, knew how to divert my mind completely from them—it seemed to me, I say, that this intimacy, this sort of imaginary relationship which I had accepted, was not only lawful, but beneficial, and I regarded it even as a just compensation for so many cruel deceptions. In a word, I had lost, through the frivolity of my recent life, that clearness of spiritual vision which is maintained by vigilance alone, and I was a long time without suspecting that this idle frivolity, with all the exuberant gayety that accompanied it, was a thousand times less dangerous than the long conversations, to which the perfect harmony of a kindred mind, and

the contact with a soul so noble that it seemed to ennoble mine, lent such a charm, and gave to my life a new interest which I had never experienced before.

There was no apparent, or even real, difference in our interviews from what they were before, and any one might have heard every word he addressed me. And yet I felt that he by no means talked to me as he did to others, and I, on my side, conversed with him as I did with no one else. We were seldom alone together, it is true, but every evening, either in the drawing-room or on the terrace, he found an opportunity of conversing with me a few moments without witnesses. He did not conceal from me that he regarded these as the most precious moments of the evening; and as to this I scarcely differed from him. Occasionally, something inexpressible in his voice, his looks, and even in his silence, made me tremble, as if I felt the warning of some approaching danger. But as he never deviated a single word from the rôle he had taken, my torpid conscience was not aroused! Lorenzo was still absent, though the time fixed for his return had long gone by; and when I was expecting him the second time, I received a letter announcing a further delay, caused, as he said, by "a circumstance that was unforeseen and independent of his will."

A flush of anger rose to my face

while reading this letter, though I felt and acknowledged that the prolongation of his absence did not cause me the same chagrin it once would. I did not ask why. I took pleasure in recalling with a kind of complacency the aggravating wrongs I had repeatedly endured, and it seemed to me he had less right than ever to deny a heart he had so cruelly wounded any consolation whatever that remained.

The day this second letter arrived we were on the point of starting for Mt. Vesuvius, where, for a week, crowds of people had been going out of curiosity, as is the case at every new eruption. It was nearly night before we set out. My aunt and her two daughters were of the party, besides Gilbert, Mario, and Lando, as well as two foreigners who, from the time of the Carnival, had assiduously haunted the steps of my two cousins. One was a young Baron von Brunnenberg, an excellent dancer and a great lover of music; the other an Englishman, no less young, of fine figure and herculean proportions, whose name was Harry Leslie.

There was a certain embarrassment at our departure among the members of the party, caused by the simultaneous desire of several of them to avoid the *calèche* in which Donna Clelia had at once installed herself. I observed this hesitation, which was far from flattering to my poor aunt, and hastened to take a seat beside her. The young baron, who escorted her, then concluded to follow my example, and I made a sign to Lando to take the vacant place. He obeyed me less eagerly than usual. Stella, my two cousins, and the young Englishman took possession of the other carriage, which assumed the lead, followed with an envious eye by the baron

as well as Lando, who, I remarked, seemed in a less serene frame of mind than usual. Gilbert and Mario came after in a *carozzella*, which formed our rear-guard.

At first everything went on pleasantly. My aunt was very fond of pleasure excursions, and she regarded this as one, particularly as we were all to take supper together at my house on our return. The conversation did not slacken an instant as far as Resina, where we arrived at nightfall. There we left the main road to take that which led directly to Mt. Vesuvius.

A new crater had this time been formed below the well-known cone from which the fire and smoke generally issued. It was like a large, gaping wound on the side of the mountain, which sent forth torrents of fire, ashes, and red-hot stones.

Consequently, instead of being obliged to climb to the summit in order to witness the eruption, we were able to drive so near the stream of lava that we only had to walk a short distance to see the terrible opening, which was approached more or less closely, according to the degree of boldness or curiosity with which each one was endowed.

But the spectacle presented an imposing appearance long before we saw it close at hand, and I was in the height of admiration when I heard a murmur beside me: "O Gesù, Gesù! . . . O Madonna santa! . . ." Turning around, I beheld my aunt, pale with fright, kissing the cross of the rosary she held in her hand.

Donna Clelia, as we are perfectly aware, knew how to brave danger when she found an occasion worthy of the trouble. We had a proof of this on the memorable day of the combat on the Toledo. But, as it

has perhaps also been perceived, she was rather indifferent to the picturesque. Consequently, there was nothing at this moment to stimulate her courage, and I was alarmed at the condition in which I saw her.

"O Ginevrina mia! . . ." said she at last in a trembling voice, "non mi fido! No, I have not the courage to go any further. . . . Mamma! . . ."

This last appeal was caused by a stream of fire brighter than any of the preceding ones, and accompanied by a loud detonation.

"But merciful Lord! What folly!" she continued. "What caprice! What madness! How can you wish to rush into such a lake of fire while you are still alive! . . . Oh! no, not yet; no, never! O mamma mia! misericordia! . . ."

Each new stream of fire produced a more lively exclamation of terror. All at once she leaned her head on my shoulder, exclaiming:

"Ginevrina! . . . I feel I am going to have a *papariello!*" *

At this we stopped the carriage. It was evidently dangerous to take her any further. But what should we do? . . . Must we give up our excursion, and retrace our steps? We were not inclined to do this. Besides, the other carriage was some distance in advance, and could not be recalled. In this dilemma we were rejoined by the *carozzella*. Gilbert and Mario leaped from their carriage to ascertain what had happened to us.

"What is it, Zia Clelia?" said Mario, approaching the carriage, and perceiving my aunt in the attitude I have just mentioned. She raised her head.

"O Mario! figlio mio! It is

because I cannot endure this storm of fire. It is the end of the world —the day of judgment! . . . How it oppresses me! . . . How it stifles me! . . . O my God! and the *povere ragazze, dove sono?* . . . O holy Virgin, lead us all back safe and sound to Naples, and I promise you that for nine days . . ."

She finished her vow mentally, for Mario at once decided on the only thing that could be done, and devoted himself to the task. He would take her back to Resina in the carriage, and there await our return.

The exchange was soon effected. My aunt did not require any insisting, after we promised to bring her daughters back without allowing them to incur any danger. In the twinkling of an eye she was placed beside Mario in the *carozzella* with her back to Mt. Vesuvius, while Gilbert took her place beside me, and we pursued our way as fast as possible, in order to make up for the time we had lost.

We soon arrived at the place where we were obliged to leave the carriage. Gilbert aided me in descending, and then gave me his arm, while Lando and the baron went in search of the other members of the party, who only had Mr. Leslie to protect them. They were soon out of sight, and Gilbert remained alone with me.

I will not repeat here what every one has seen or read concerning the eruptions of Mt. Vesuvius. I will merely say to those who have not had the experience, that this extraordinary spectacle, assuredly the most wonderful and at the same time the most terrific in the whole world of nature, causes a singular fascination which induces the spectator to approach continually nearer and nearer the fiery crater. It

* Neapolitan for a nervous attack.

seems impossible to turn away his eyes. He keeps on, therefore, without looking to the right or left, without seeing where he is walking, stumbling at every step over heaps of lava scarcely cold, regardless of the rough path with its sharp, burning stones, the effect of which is afterwards seen on his garments and shoes, though he does not think of it while exposed to the danger, more apparent, perhaps, than real, but which indubitably exists, however, as is proved by the numerous accidents that occur at every new eruption.

Leaning on Gilbert's arm, I was too firmly supported to stumble, and was able to ascend to the top of a ridge of lava formed by preceding eruptions; and there, protected by an immense block on the very edge of the flaming abyss, I contemplated the awful, imposing spectacle! Gilbert did not utter a word, and I attributed his silence to the impression which likewise rendered me dumb in the presence of this terrific convulsion of nature. The burning lava, issuing, as I have said, from a crater on the side of the mountain, did not spring up to fall back again on the summit, as usual, but it advanced like a large river of fire over the heaped-up masses of cold, black lava, giving them the most singular, fantastic forms. It was like a city, not on fire, but of fire! It seemed as if one could see houses, towers, and palaces; and in the midst of these imaginary edifices moved the fiery stream! For lava does not flow. However steep the descent, it stops and goes no further as soon as the crater ceases to emit it. But it had not yet stopped. On the contrary, it pursued its slow, pitiless course, consuming vineyards, swallowing up houses, and

burning the trees and bushes in its way.

It was a sight difficult to endure for a long time, and yet I could not turn my eyes away from so mysterious and terrible a spectacle.

"O my God!" I murmured, "this is truly *la città dolente!* We have before our eyes an exact representation of the last day of the world! . . ."

Gilbert made no reply. He was overcome by I know not what emotion more powerful than mine, and, looking at his face by the red light of the fire, I was alarmed at the change in his features and their unusual expression.

"Would that that day had arrived for me!" said he at length. "Would that this were really the last day of my life! Yes, I would like to be swallowed up in that flame! I would like to die here on the spot where I am—beside you—worthy of you. . . ."

In spite of the terrific scene before me, in spite of the noise of the explosions and the sullen sound of the lava, the tone in which he spoke was distinctly audible, and made my heart beat with mingled emotion and fear.

"I am afraid you are becoming dizzy, Monsieur de Kergy," said I in a trembling voice; "take care. Its effect, they say, is to draw one into the abyss."

"Yes, Donna Ginevra," replied he in the same strange tone, "you are right. I am dizzy. I am approaching the verge of an abyss, I know. I have rashly exposed myself to the danger. I have presumed too much on my strength."

The look he fastened on me, as he uttered these words, gave them a meaning I could not mistake. It was no longer Gilbert who spoke—

it was not he to whom I had accorded the rights of a safe and faithful friend. The veil with which I had wilfully blinded my eyes suddenly fell off, and the emotion I was seized with, the material flames that surrounded me, and the certain peril into which another step would have plunged me, gave an exact idea of the danger to which I had foolishly exposed my honor and my soul!

I covered my face a moment with my hands, but spoke as soon as I dared.

"Monsieur de Kergy," said I in a supplicating tone, "cease to look at the fire around us. Lift up your eyes, and see how calm and beautiful the night is above this terrible *inferno*."

In fact, a bright moonlight was diffused over this terrific scene, and the contrast between the earth and sky could not have been more striking.

Gilbert's eyes followed mine, and remained for some time fastened on those peaceful starry worlds, which seemed as far remote from the agitation of our hearts as they were above this frightful convulsion of nature. I felt in my soul the need of powerful assistance, and murmured in a low tone: "O my God, have mercy on me!" with a fervor that for a long time I had not felt in my prayers.

After a long silence, Gilbert said to me in a low, agitated tone:

"Will you pardon me, madame? Will you trust in me to take you away from this place?"

"Yes, I trust you. But let us

make haste to leave so dangerous a spot. Do you not hear the frightful explosions? Do you not see the red-hot stones that are flying over our heads? . . ." And as I spoke a cloud of thick smoke added obscurity to all the other horrors of the place.

"Do not be alarmed," said Gilbert in a tone once more calm and decided. "We must certainly hurry away, but there is no danger yet, unless from fear. Give me your hand."

But I hesitated when he endeavored to take it, and made an involuntary movement, as if going to descend without his assistance.

"In the name of heaven," said he rapidly, trembling with agitation and terror, "do not refuse my assistance in the danger we are in. You cannot do without it. You *must* give me your hand, madame."

His agitated voice became almost imperious. I gave him my hand, and even complied when he told me to rest the other firmly against his shoulder.

"Now," said he, "descend carefully. You need not be afraid. I will support you. In spite of this whirlwind of fire and smoke, I can clearly distinguish my way."

He made no further observations, as we slowly descended; and as soon as we were in a place of safety, I left him, and leaned against a tree at some distance, trying to get breath. Besides the violent agitation of my heart, the suffocating air that surrounded us gave me a feeling of giddiness and faintness that was almost overpowering.

XXXI.

The stream of fire and smoke that obliged us to leave the place where we were standing had a like

effect on all who were in the vicinity of the fiery current. We were therefore soon joined by Teresina

and Lando, Mariuccia and the baron. But I felt extremely anxious at seeing nothing of Stella and young Leslie, who had left the others to go further below, in order to get a better view of the lava in its course to the plain. The fear lest some accident had happened to them began to chill the blood in my veins, but I was soon reassured by seeing them at last reappear with blackened faces and torn garments, while Stella was bareheaded, and her hair streaming in disorder.

"Good heavens! what has happened to you?"

"Nothing, nothing," said Stella, out of breath. "We will tell you everything by-and-by."

Here Mr. Leslie interposed, declaring that the Countess Stella was "the bravest woman he had ever met—a heroine, and an angel of goodness."

"You are entirely mistaken," said Stella, drawing up the hood of her cloak. "But I have lost my bonnet, and nearly destroyed my shoes also, I fear. Let us start immediately. We will relate everything afterwards."

As she was there safe and sound, it was really much better to put off any further particulars till another time, and return to Naples as quickly as possible. We started, therefore, without any delay, only stopping at Resina long enough to take my aunt, who, having devoted the whole time of our absence to a siesta, was completely rested, and had quite recovered from her terror. Mario was less good-humored; but when, a little after midnight, we all assembled at last around the supper-table that awaited our return, every one seemed satisfied with the excursion we had made. I alone felt I had brought

back a heart more agitated than at our departure.

Stella still refused to answer our questions, pretending to be too hungry to think of giving the account we were all so eager to hear; but Mr. Leslie was only too glad to assume the task, and at once proceeded to satisfy our curiosity.

"We were," said he, "watching the lava, as it advanced with a dull sound resembling the distant report of grape-shot, when all at once we heard a succession of heart-rending groans a few steps off. At our approach we found a man lying on the ground. I endeavored to raise him. Impossible: he had broken his leg. Countess Stella questioned him, and the story he related was a sad one. Like so many of the other poor creatures, he had deferred leaving his house till the last moment. His wife was ill in bed, with a little boy of five or six years old beside her. He kept hoping the lava would stop before it could reach his dwelling—they all hope that! He went out two or three times an hour to see how far it had progressed, and finally saw all hope was vain. The lava kept on its course, regardless of any one. He had barely more than half an hour to save his wife and child, and then carry away what he could. He rushed towards the house; but in the haste with which he endeavored to make up for lost time, he had fallen from one of those black rocks you are so familiar with, on the spot where we found him, unable to rise. It was necessary to hasten; the lava was continually advancing. In less than a quarter of an hour it would reach his hut, and his wife and child were there! . . . I could not understand what he said," continued the young Englishman with

an expression of benevolence and courage which added to the effect of his narrative, "but while I was gazing at the devouring current that was advancing towards a house I supposed empty, I suddenly saw the countess dart forward without any explanation. I understood it at once, and followed her. Outrunning her, I was the first to arrive at the house, and had already taken the woman and mattress in my arms when the countess joined me. 'Take the child!' I cried. He was screaming, the poor thing; for, in taking up his mother, I had, without intending it, thrown him on the floor. He was a boy of about six years of age, and heavy to carry, I assure you. But kindness and courage gave strength. The countess picked him up as if he were a feather, and we hurried out of the house. The heat of the fire was already intolerable, and the earth under our feet heaved at every step. I thought a dozen times we had sacrificed our own lives in trying to save theirs. But no, thank God! we all succeeded—woman, child, and ourselves, with the mattress—in reaching the poor wounded man, whose cries of terror now gave place to those of joy. He had reason—the poor creature!—for we were hardly in safety before we heard a horrid sound, this time like the noise of cannon—it was the shock of the burning lava against the house we had just escaped from. What a sight! Good God! . . . But since it must have happened, I am not sorry I was there! The fiery stream first passed around the house, then rose, as if to wrap its red flame around it, and finally swept over the roof; and when everything was engulfed, it quietly continued its course. The poor people wept; but, after all,

they were thankful to be alive, and kissed the hands of the Countess Stella, calling her an angel sent by the Madonna and a thousand other things of that kind. It was now time to call for assistance, and by the aid of two or three peasants we transported them all into a habitation, where they were received for the night. To-morrow I shall go and carry them some assistance. And now, Madame la Duchesse, you know how the Countess Stella lost her bonnet, and why we were so late." •

The effect produced by this account cannot be described. Gilbert eagerly raised his head, and I saw his eyes glisten as he listened. As for me, my heart leaped with a kind of transport, while my dear, noble Stella made fruitless efforts to stop the acclamations her courage drew even from those who were the least accessible to enthusiasm.

"What an absurdity!" exclaimed she as soon as she could make herself heard. "Who of you would not have done the same thing? Stop, I beg of you, or rather, listen to me. Let us all join in buying these poor people a cottage to replace the one they have lost."

This proposition was of course acceded to with ardor and unanimity. My Aunt Clelia instantly plunged into the depths of her pocket, and had already opened her well-stocked *porte-monnaie* when Lando rose and exclaimed:

"Stop, Donna Clelia; put your gold back in your pocket—for the moment. I have an idea. Let us do as they do in Paris."

"Oh! bravo!" exclaimed my two cousins in a breath.

"Yes," said Teresina with enthusiasm, "as at Paris, I beg of you. But what? how? say?"

"Listen, all," said Lando—"lis-

ten to my programme. It contains a rôle for us all. First, Donna Ginevra's is the easiest, but most indispensable. She must lend us one of her drawing-rooms where a small but select number can assemble. This *réunion* shall take place to-morrow, . . . no, the day after to-morrow, when—pay special attention now, Monsieur le Comte de Kergy."

Gilbert, hearing his name, looked up with surprise, while Lando stopped to say very swiftly in Italian to his neighbor, "You know he is celebrated for his eloquence," then continued: "And then, the Comte de Kergy, here present, shall, at the opening of the meeting, make a brief discourse, in order to explain the object of the contribution we shall afterwards expect of each one. He will relate the account we have just heard, and add all he pleases about the excursion we have made together and the various incidents that have taken place. We shall depend on his omitting nothing that occurred. *Poi*, Donna Teresa and Donna Mariuccia will sing a duet, accompanied by the Baron von Brunnenberg; and if you wish for a general chorus, here we are, Mario, Leslie, and myself, ready to lend our assistance. *Finalmente*, we come to the most important; the Countess Stella will recite some poetry of her own choice, and you who have heard her know what is in reserve for those who are to hear her for the first time. After that is the moment to present your contributions, and you shall give me the result. *Che ne dite!"*

I could not have declined, even if I had had any serious objections against this proposition, which was unanimously received with even more enthusiasm than the first. Stella, though really endowed with

the talent Lando was desirous of profiting by, seemed annoyed. Gilbert's face darkened, and he resumed the gloomy, preoccupied expression he had for an instant shaken off; but to protest or refuse was as impossible for them as well as me, and before separating, at two o'clock in the morning, the meeting was decided upon and appointed for the next day but one.

When I found myself alone, it was impossible to think of sleep, notwithstanding the advanced hour of the night. My chamber was at one end of the house, and opened on the lateral terrace opposite that of the drawing-room. I opened my window, and took a seat outside. There, in the imposing silence of that beautiful night, I sought calmness and the power of reflection. The uncommon courage Stella had just given a proof of produced a salutary effect on me. Her example reacted somewhat against a fatal enervation that was gradually diminishing my moral strength. I admired courage, and my soul, however enfeebled it might be, responded at this moment to her noble, generous impulse. With my eyes fastened on the flame that now lit up the whole horizon with its sinister gleam, I thought the sight ought to inspire Stella with a lofty emotion such as follows the accomplishment of an heroic deed; whereas I—it was with a shudder I thought of the contrast it suggested! . . . I tried to avoid dwelling on what had taken place. I wished to believe it was my imagination alone that disturbed and alarmed me; that nothing was changed; but I could not succeed, and at last I was forced to consider what I should do—what was the course prescribed by the new light to which I could no longer close

my eyes? But as soon as this question was clearly placed before me, I experienced the most violent repugnance to solve it.

Gilbert's sweet, beneficent friendship alone had enabled me to endure the destruction of my happiness. Could I admit the necessity of renouncing it? What had he ever done till to-day to give me reason to regret my confidence in him? For an instant, it is true, and only for an instant, he had not seemed like himself, and my heart beat, in spite of myself, as I recalled his look and the accent of his voice; but did I not attach too much importance to words which, after all, were vague and incoherent? Should I not take time to reflect? Such were the questions I asked myself, in order to impose silence on my reason and the actual voice of my conscience. I succeeded so far as to defer the reply I was unwilling to listen to, and put off my decision, whatever it might be, till the following day.

It was late when I awoke, for I did not go to sleep till daylight; and I had not yet left my chamber when the following letter was brought me. It was dated the same day at three o'clock in the morning:

"MADAME: A few hours ago I addressed you in a moment of delirium. What I said I know not. But what I do know is that you understood me, and, in order to regain your confidence and make you forget what I uttered, I should be obliged to declare what is false, and this I cannot do. No, I will not be false to myself, were I, by speaking the truth, to forfeit a happiness I ought to have courage enough to deny myself, and which I shall, at least, renounce if you require it."

"I only ask you not to condemn me without a hearing. For once allow me to speak plainly, though it be of myself; which is repugnant to me, as you may have perceived. But it is necessary to do this in order to throw light on the decision you will afterwards have to make.

"I believe I have a high idea of the use a man should make of his life, as well as a profound conviction he will have to render an account of the way he spends it. In a word, I adhere, thank God, to the faith of my mother, and desire to live as much as possible in accordance with this faith, and as it becomes an honest man and a Christian to live.

"To this end, I have given my activity every possible scope—long, fatiguing journeys, hard study, active concurrence in a multitude of enterprises that seemed to have an useful object. I have entered eagerly into everything that could absorb my mind and time, not so much out of disinterested zeal for doing good, as from a calculation that is allowable, I think; for it is founded on a distrust of myself, resulting from an exact knowledge of the shoals on which I might easily be wrecked.

"I dreamed of a happiness, common enough in many countries, but rare in ours—that of knowing, loving, and choosing the one I would make my own; but this is a difficult thing in France, and I had a strong repugnance to any other way of deciding my lot. I persistently refused to consent to any of those so-called chance encounters one is constantly drawn into by officious friends without number in Paris, who are always ready to take possession of any one who has the misfortune to be considered a *bon parti*.

"In avoiding these encounters I was spared other temptations still more dangerous, and I met with nothing to disturb my peace of mind till the day I saw you the first time, madame. I had no conversation with you on that occasion, but I observed you, I heard your voice, and listened to some of your remarks. I noticed your indifference to the homage that surrounded you, and the evident absence of vanity which your beauty rendered so strange, and I became afraid of you. Yes, I felt I must avoid you, and I did so resolutely. One day, however, you were, without my being aware of it, in the audience I addressed, and Diana afterwards presented me to you. The opinion of every one else immediately became indifferent to me. I only cared to know what you thought of my discourse, and to ascertain if there was any mental sympathy between us. I thought I discovered some in the few words we exchanged, and my resolution to avoid you only became the more fixed. I even resisted my mother's entreaties to join some of the excursions she made with you. Consequently, I only met you once, as you are aware, madame, and that was at home, where I could not avoid the happiness of being beside you.

"I perceived you were sad that evening, in spite of your charming smile and gayety of manner, which were no less dangerous to me than your tears. I saw it, and was terribly agitated. And when at last the time came to bid you farewell, I could not summon the resolution, but said instead '*'au revoir.'*'

"Nevertheless, I allowed long months to pass. I waited till time had somewhat effaced the vividness of my recent impressions, so I

should no longer fear to meet you, and then I made an excuse to stop at Naples a few days on my way to Egypt. The day I arrived here, though I detest balls, I could not avoid attending that given by the French ambassador, and there I saw you once more!

"Shall I acknowledge it? When I saw you in all the splendor of your dazzling beauty, enhanced by your dress, and surrounded by adorers, I felt a momentary relief. I congratulated myself on having braved the danger of seeing you again. It seemed to me at that moment the image I had so cherished in my heart was effaced, and I was no longer in any danger. Alas! the next day you were no longer the same. I found you as you once were, but I had not the courage to fly from you. My stay was to be short, and I yielded to the happiness allotted me, persuading myself the habit of seeing you daily might diminish the effect of your influence.

"At length, madame, in good faith, as I thought, I ventured one day to ask you to regard me as a friend, and promised to be worthy of the favor. I firmly believed I promised you nothing beyond my strength. A single instant was sufficient to reveal to me, even more clearly than to you, the extent of my illusion. You see I make no attempt to conceal anything from you now. I no longer try to deceive you. But in spite of all I have said, I implore you not to bid me depart. In asking this I feel sure of never offending you again. I cannot hope for the return of your confidence. I no longer claim to be regarded as a friend. I even promise to speak to you henceforth but seldom. But I beseech you not to deprive me of the happiness of seeing you! Do

not punish me so severely! Do not yet command me to go. That word would be an order I should at once obey, or rather a sentence I should submit to without a mur-

mur; but there is no criminal who has not the right to petition for mercy, and that mercy I now implore at your feet.

“GILBERT.”

XXXII.

My mother, in portraying the lineaments of my youthful soul, once spoke of a precious jewel hidden in its depths. She doubtless referred to the inclination for what is right and the lively horror of evil she discovered there. But does not this jewel exist with more or less purity and brilliancy in the depths of every human soul, requiring only a perverted will to crush it utterly, or a feeble, undecided will to tarnish its lustre and diminish its value? My life, though not very culpable in appearance, was now drawing me in its soft current into that state of sluggishness, inaction, and weakness which is a dissolvent of this supernatural jewel without any equal in the natural world.

Lorenzo, notwithstanding his jealous vigilance during the earlier period of our married life, did not hesitate to take me to all the theatres, and at Paris he placed in my hands some of the most celebrated romances of the day. This somewhat disturbed the equilibrium of my mind, and produced a certain agitation of soul, which is the natural consequence of an unhealthy interest in works to which genius and talent have the cruelty to lend their irresistible power. When we reflect on the value of these divine gifts, the source from which they emanate, and their power of diffusing light and awakening the mental faculties, we cannot help thinking how cruel it is to employ them in kindling everywhere a fire so de-

structive to the human soul—the only real, irrevocable death.

But, in spite of the inevitable effect spoken of above, the strong disgust and repugnance they speedily produced in my mind prevented their poisonous emanations from affecting me seriously. Now, after being so long exposed to influences doubtless less deleterious than those, but by no means strengthening, a more subtle snare was laid for me. . . . The letter I held in my hand was not an effusion that should instantly have aroused my conscience, which, though torpid, was not hardened; no, its language was such that I read and reread it, and allowed the sentiments it expressed to penetrate my very heart. And yet, what was the substance of this letter; what was its real signification? However noble and superior to other men Gilbert might appear in my eyes, of what avail was this nobleness, this superiority, this purity of his soul even, when he began to tread the lower path of common mortals with the vain thought that he could maintain a straight course better than others; . . . that he could make me so decidedly explicit a declaration, and promise me an inviolable respect, which he immediately deviated from the first time he had the opportunity? . . .

But this truth did not at that time appear in the light in which I saw it at a later day, and a terrible struggle took place in my heart. Illusion was no longer possible. I

could no longer say I had a sure, faithful friend whose attachment was allowable, and yet I could not decide to give it up. I tried to persuade myself, with all those arguments that present themselves as soon as one is ready to listen to them, that this sacrifice was unnecessary. In the bottom of my soul, however, another voice made itself heard, repeating more strongly the warning of the night before—a sweet, divine voice, scarcely audible in the midst of all this agitation, and, when heard, was not listened to!

That was the day I usually went to see Livia, but it was quite late before I remembered it. My first thought was to omit going for once, but as I had always been punctual at these interviews, in spite of every obstacle, and Saturday was the only day I could be received, after some minutes' hesitation I surmounted the temptation to remain at home.

During the whole period of frivolous gayety that marked the first months of my life at Naples, far from wishing to avoid seeing Livia, I took pleasure, on the contrary, in asking her advice, which I was by no means as afraid of, even in Carnival time, as my Aunt Clelia. I was something like a place besieged and almost surrounded by the enemy, but still not wholly inaccessible to the friendly power disposed to deliver it. As I have said elsewhere, Livia's voice always took a correct pitch, unmistakable to the ear, and I loved to listen to it, even when mine was too weak to sound the same note with like power and clearness.

But from the day of Lorenzo's departure, so doubly fatal, instead of the careless gayety I usually went to the convent to acknowledge

and correct, I was filled with a sadness and anxiety Livia was not slow to perceive, and, instead of gently shaking her head, as she smiled at my account of the somewhat too gay a life into which I had been led by Lorenzo, she now fastened a grave, anxious look on me, to which I replied by pouring out all the bitterness of my fresh grievances without any restraint. After this explanation, which sufficiently accounted for the change she had remarked, I spoke no more of myself, and never once mentioned Gilbert's name. I was angry with myself for this reserve. I longed to overcome it, and tell her, as I had often told myself, that in Gilbert heaven had sent me a friend whose influence was delightful, salutary, elevated, pure, and so on. These words came to my lips, but I could not utter them before her.

Once (it was the Saturday before) there was a new change in the expression of my face—a change which reflected, I suppose, the insecure and dangerous happiness to which I had unscrupulously yielded. Seeing me appear with a smiling air and a calm untroubled face, she at first seemed pleased, but, after observing me for some time, said :

“Has Lorenzo returned?”

“No.”

She looked thoughtful.

“Do you know when he will return?”

“I do not know,” said I bitterly; “and, in fact, I begin never to expect him, and almost not to wish him to return.”

I saw a slight movement of her clasped hands like a shudder. She raised her large eyes, and, looking me in the face, said :

“Take care.”

Her look and words greatly troubled me, and I did not recover from the impression till it was time for Gilbert to arrive in the evening, when his presence made me forget it. I thought of this to-day, and perhaps the remembrance added to the repugnance I felt to go to the convent. Perhaps it also caused the unusual emotion I experienced when I found myself once more in the parlor—the very parlor that filled me with so much terror the first time I entered it, but which I afterwards forgot, so different were the impressions that followed.

But whatever the joy, the trouble, the agitation, or, as to-day, the anguish, with which I came, a few minutes sufficed to put me in harmony with the inexpressible tranquillity that reigned around me. The pulsations of my heart diminished, and I experienced the effect a pure, vivifying air produces on one who has just come from a heavy, feverish atmosphere. The bare walls, the wooden seats, the extreme simplicity and austerity on every side, inspired me with a kind of attraction that would have surprised those who daily saw me in my sumptuous home, surrounded by all that wealth and the most refined taste could procure. This attraction, incomprehensible to myself, was like that vague perfume the traveller breathes when approaching some unknown shore which he does not yet perceive. . . .

But on this occasion these things, instead of producing their usually beneficial, soothing effect, caused me a kind of uneasiness akin to remorse, and I soon found the solitude so difficult to endure that I had some idea of profiting by the interval that remained in order to leave the convent under some pretext without seeing my sister. But the strength

of mind that, thank heaven, I still possessed prevented me from leaving the place, and I became absorbed in thoughts I dared not fathom, so utterly discordant were they with everything around me, and so different from what they seemed in the light by which I regarded them only an hour before.

At last the door opened, the curtain was drawn aside, and Livia made her appearance.

"You are late, Gina," said she. "I was afraid I should not see you to-day."

I stammered some excuse, as she gave me a scrutinizing look with her usual expression of extreme sweetness.

"You do not look so happy as you did last Saturday, Ginevra. You are agitated and excited to-day. Will you not tell me the reason?"

I was tempted to make her a thorough, sincere confession; but the moment I was about to begin I was struck with the impossibility of speaking in that angelic place of what seemed elsewhere only natural, excusable, and almost legitimate.

Seeing I made no reply, she gently said :

"Lorenzo has not yet come home. Of course his absence afflicts you. Be patient and forbearing, I conjure you, Ginevra."

Her words caused me a kind of irritation, though I was glad to elude her previous question, and I hastily replied :

"Livia, you require too much of me. Some day I may become patient and forbearing, but at present it is impossible."

"Gina, Gina, do not say so," said she in the tone in which she used to correct the faults of my childhood.

"O Livia! your poor sister finds life hard, I assure you. How happy you are! . . ."

"Yes, I am happy," she softly replied.

"Who would have said it, however," I continued in an agitated tone, "when Lorenzo came to woo me with so many assurances of affection, so many promises of happiness? . . . That all this should prove false and illusory! . . . Oh! when I think of it, I no longer have the strength to . . ."

"Ginevra!" said Livia, suddenly interrupting me in a tone of authority, "it is useless to talk in that manner. You speak like a child!"

She seldom spoke to me in this way, and I stopped.

"At the time you are speaking of," she resumed, "do you remember my telling you one day—it was only a short time before your marriage . . .?"

I hastily interrupted her in my turn.

"I have not forgotten our conversation, Livia. That was the day you told me I was going to pronounce *the most fearful vow there is in the world*. But, sister, I was not the only one who made it."

"No, certainly not. You mean to say that Lorenzo has violated the solemn vow that bound you together. . . . Yes, Gina, it is horrible, I acknowledge, but listen to me; if you continue to think more of your own wrongs than of God, whom he has offended a thousand times more; if you continue to complain and dwell on your injuries, the result will be, you will soon seek likewise to be released from the fidelity you vowed to him. And then (may God preserve me from ever seeing that day, when I shall be truly separated from you!) your fall will be speedy, rapid, and terrible. You will fall as low, perhaps, as you might now rise high."

She saw me shudder at these

words, and continued with her usual mildness:

"Now, my dearest Gina, may God and his angels watch over you! . . . It is growing dark. The bell is about to summon me away. I have only time for one word: *Forget your heart*, I implore you. Believe me, God will some day satisfy its cravings, if you cease to listen so weakly to them, longing to have them gratified at all costs. Forget your heart, I say, and think only of your soul!"

The bell rang while she was speaking. She raised her hand, and made the sign of the cross in the air. I bowed my head, and when I raised it again she had disappeared. But she had not spoken in vain. The clouds that obscured my reason began to disperse, my courage began to revive, and the jewel within to regain the brilliancy that had been obscured in the depths of my soul. The course I ought to pursue was set before me with painful distinctness, but I no longer turned my eyes away from it.

I was not happy when I left the convent. I did not even feel calm or consoled; but I had come to a decision.

It was so late when I arrived home that the garden was filled with moonlight. I walked there a long time, absorbed in my reflections, and sincerely endeavoring to strengthen a resolution whose fulfilment I did not yet dare to consider. I trembled as I asked myself if it was necessary to utter the decisive word before another day, or if I could wait till after the *soirée* organized by Lando, when it would be no longer possible to defer it.

I still hesitated as to this point. Though I had come to a decision, I did not cease to suffer, but I ceased to be weak. I was very far

from the summit, but I resolved to attain it, instead of remaining as far below as I now stood. A circumstance, insignificant in itself, now occurred to confirm the change in my mind.

The door of Lorenzo's studio was open, and, wishing to shorten the way to my chamber, I entered it, and was proceeding towards the other door when I found myself face to face with the vestal of which I was the model. The moon threw so brilliant a light over it as to produce a striking effect. I stopped to look at it, and, while doing so, it seemed as if this statue of myself spoke to me in its own way, and in a language similar to that I had so recently been listening to.

And what was the idea which Lorenzo really intended to express in this vestal—the finest of his productions?

One of those ideas which, under the inspiration of genius, sometimes sprang from his soul, and seemed for an instant to show a sense of the good equal to that he had of the beautiful. This was, alas! only a transitory gleam of light, but it was sufficient to justify the ambitious hopes I once felt for a day—hopes so fatally illusory at the very time they were conceived!

Lorenzo's idea in choosing the ancient guardians of the sacred fire as his subjects was to represent under these two figures the woman who was true to her highest mission, and the woman who was untrue to it; the latter making use of the holy fire under her charge to kindle a flame that would end in destruction and woe; the other striving to keep this very fire alive, diffusing its clear, brilliant, beneficent light, not only over herself, but over everything around her.

Such was the idea he had not been able to embody, he said, till he had me for his model. All this was doubtless the dream of an artist; but while I stood contemplating what had resulted from it, the effect I experienced was so strange, the thoughts that came to my mind were so vivid, that they could only have been the whisperings of the voice that for an hour had spoken more and more clearly to my heart.

The statue, however idealized it might be by the genius of the sculptor, resembled me sufficiently for me to recognize the likeness. Flooded as it now was by a brilliant, unearthly light, I looked at it with an attention I had never done before. I observed its simple, dignified attitude; the head slightly inclined towards the symbolic flame that rose from the lamp she bore in her hands with so much ease, and yet with care and vigilance; and, finally, the mouth and eyes, in which it seemed to me no artist had ever expressed so clearly the gentleness, firmness, and purity he wished to depict. It was thus Lorenzo imagined the guardian of the divine fire which not only burned on the sacred altar, but kindled and fed the noblest inspirations of genius. . . .

Yes, the conception was a beautiful one, and I felt proud and gratified that he had found me worthy of being the model to realize it!

All at once I was struck with a kind of terror, as it occurred to me, Shall this resemblance be merely external? Are not many things wanting in my nature which this statue seeks to express, and of which its beauty is only the reflection? . . .

O my God! I thank thee! Everything becomes an instrument

in thy hand. It was thou, and not this marble, who didst suggest this thought, and it was through thy grace that, at that moment, quicker than I can express it, and as clearly as the eye beholds a picture placed suddenly before it, I all at once saw if Lorenzo were present, under the roof that was his, and Gilbert were also there—Gilbert, who called himself my friend and not his—there would exist at my fireside, there would be infused into my life, a perpetual lie, unmistakable treachery, and constant danger. I saw and realized that, though he might not apparently have anything

to reproach me for, everything within and around me would henceforth continually reproach me. I saw if the sacred lamp did not actually fall from my hands, the purity of its flame would speedily be dimmed, and certainly end by being wholly extinguished. . . .

All this became clearly visible and palpable, and in the presence of this voiceless marble, before the image of this pagan priestess, I renewed the tacit promise I had an hour before made to her who was the living Christian realization of this ancient ideal of a virtue pure and chaste.

XXXIII.

I went up to my chamber, not only startled at the vividness of the impression I had received, but decided as to my course. The words *falsehood* and *treachery* that came to my mind produced a powerful effect on me, and would, perhaps, have had the same effect on every woman who happened to be in a similar position, if she had the courage to call things in this way by their right names. It is pleasant and delightful to inspire and to experience those profound emotions sung by poets and exalted by writers of fiction, but it is not noble to be false. No poet has ever said so, no writer of fiction has ventured to insinuate it. Now, it is this falsity, so essential a feature in all these little dramas of the heart (real or fictitious), which ought, it seems to me, to disgust even those who do not act from any higher motive than those of the world. As for me, the mere thought that it would henceforth be impossible to speak of Gilbert's friendship without falsehood, and, at Lorenzo's return, that I should not have the

same right as before to look him in the face—this thought, I say, was sufficient to inspire me at this moment with so much determination that I thought my irresolution at an end. It seemed as if I should have but little difficulty in accomplishing the task from which I no longer endeavored to escape. But in the evening, when, at a late hour, Gilbert arrived, I was somewhat moved at perceiving my outward calmness and animation made him suppose I acquiesced in his wishes; for, after looking at me an instant, he seemed suddenly relieved from a lively apprehension, and his eyes flashed with joy.

There was considerable company in the drawing-room that evening, and consequently a good deal of noise. They had a kind of rehearsal of what was to take place the following evening. My cousins were at the piano with the baron and Lando. Leslie, at a distance, was gazing at Stella, who, under the pretext of looking over a volume of Dante, in order to select something to recite, was seated apart,

silent and absorbed. There was no one on the terrace, and I proceeded in that direction. I felt that Gilbert's eyes followed me; but he hesitated about joining me. I likewise felt some hesitation, but, fearing I might again become irresolute, and wishing at once to make it impossible to yield to the danger, I looked up, and motioned for him to follow me. In an instant he was at my side, and, as I remained silent, he said in an agitated tone:

"I hope you have pardoned me, madame."

I was terribly moved on my part, but it would not do to manifest it.

"Yes," I replied, "I forgive you; for you have been sincere, and that is worth everything else. But, Monsieur de Kergy, I must be sincere likewise. Let me therefore say to you, leave Naples. You ought to, and it is my wish."

He was greatly agitated, but did not utter a word. I continued with a calmness that astonished me, though my heart beat with frightful rapidity:

"To-morrow, I know, every one will depend on hearing you speak, and I also. But do not remain in Naples beyond the following day, if you can possibly help it. And after you are gone, I am sure you will be glad you obeyed me."

He made no reply.

"Who knows?" continued I gently. "The day will come, perhaps, when we can meet again—when we can be truly friends without deceit, without falseness in the real sense of the word. What is impossible now may not be always."

While I was speaking he leaned against the wall with folded arms. He listened at first with his head bent down; but he now suddenly raised it, and I saw such a veil of

sadness over his eyes and whole face that I had to make a violent effort to maintain my self-command.

At last he said:

"You are right. It was folly in me to come; it would be greater folly to remain. I will obey you, madame. I cannot complain, and I respect you as much as I . . ."

He stopped, for I made a deprecatory gesture. What I had to say was said, and I felt our interview ought not to be prolonged. I was about to leave the terrace when he detained me.

"A moment more, madame, I beg—only one, and the last; for who knows if you will grant me another, even to bid you farewell? . . ."

I stopped.

"Yes," continued he slowly, "I would like to think, as you say, that I shall be permitted to see you again some day, and sincerely be your friend. Time will pass over my head and yours. You will not always be young and beautiful. Long years will doubtless pass. To enable me to endure the present, I must look forward to the time when I shall be no longer young, and can see you again, and resume without fear the title I ought not to claim, I acknowledge, while there is any danger of profaning it. I await that day."

It was by no means with indifference I listened to his agitated, trembling voice; but I manifested nothing outwardly, and was even able to smile, as I replied:

"It will not be necessary to wait so long as you suppose, I assure you. Long before my hair grows white, what there is good and true in your friendship will be restored to me. For before that day some one, more beautiful than I (whom it

will not be difficult to find), and, moreover, worthy of you, to whom you can give your whole heart, will have effaced the remembrance of the passing fancy I have caused without intending it, but which shall not be prolonged a single instant with my consent."

I passed by him without looking up or giving him time to reply, and returned to the drawing-room. There I seated myself on a sofa in an obscure corner of the room, or rather, I fell on it, pale, faint, and exhausted by the effort I had made.

I did not believe a word of what I had just said to Gilbert. My duty was to send him away, and this duty was accomplished! But I by no means desired another should so soon efface my image. I said so to allay his regret and appear indifferent. I was proud of the courage I had manifested. When I compared myself with Lorenzo, I thought myself perfectly heroic, and I was about to have reason to think myself a thousand times more so.

Lando at that moment left the piano, where he had been stationed all the evening beside Teresina. The latter, it may be remarked *en passant*, had profited so well by his hints that her toilet had become irreproachable, and now added singularly to the effect of her beauty. Lando perceived it, and it was evident he also thought of my cousin's by no means despicable dowry among her other attractions, as a possible means of abridging his exile and returning to Paris before the two years had expired. When, therefore, I saw him coming with a grave air towards the place where I was seated, I thought I was about to receive a communication I had long been

prepared for. I did not suspect what he had to say concerned me much more directly than himself.

"Cousin Ginevra," said he in a low tone, as he took a seat beside me, "I have had news from Milan."

I started involuntarily. He did not notice it, but continued:

"News which proves I was not mistaken the other day when I told you the beautiful Faustina would take good care to avenge you. Only, I did not think it would be so soon."

Brought back so suddenly to the most painful reality of my life, I was the more startled and confounded at what he said. Lando's gossip was usually odious to me; but now, instead of imposing silence on him, I insisted, on the contrary, that he should conceal nothing from me.

"Well, then," continued he, "it seems the fair Milanese, notwithstanding her *belle passion* for Lorenzo, had never been able to console herself for being deprived of the duchess' coronet on which she had depended. So while neglecting nothing to maintain the ascendancy she had regained over him, she was not wholly indifferent to the homage of a certain potentate from the Danube who offered to share with her his principality and his millions. She was still hesitating, it seems, between ambition and love, when Lorenzo, who had some suspicion, and was on the alert, unexpectedly came upon his rival. Then there was a violent scene and high words, which ended in a challenge. They were on the point of fighting when the lady prevented the affair from going any further by declaring she would give her hand to the potentate! . . . So in a short time, I imagine," con-

tinued Lando, rubbing his hands, "Donna Faustina will take her departure for the banks of the Danube. You will be delivered for ever from her, and we shall soon see Lorenzo come home in a terrible humor. But, frankly, it is good enough for him. This punishment is not the hundredth part of what he merits when he has a wife like you!"

"O merciful heaven! what a fate is mine! and what a husband I am obliged to immolate myself to! . . ."

Such was my first thought on hearing this account, and an hour after, when I went to my chamber, I had not yet overcome the bitterness and agitation it caused me. My temptation became stronger and more formidable than ever, and the desire again sprang up in my heart to retract the sentence I had so recently pronounced. To see him, hear him, sometimes speak to him, and meet his sympathetic glance—was all this really forbidden me? Would this be failing in my duty to the husband who had outraged me so publicly? No, no, it could not be. . . . No one yet knew Gilbert was to leave Naples. A line, a word, from me, would suffice to prevent his departure. The new life created by

his presence would continue as if nothing had happened that ought to terminate it! . . . I had already seized my pen and written the word . . . when suddenly there awoke in my memory the words of Livia: "Think of God, whom he has offended a thousand times more than he has you"; and afterwards these: "If you seek likewise to be released, your fall will be speedy, rapid, and terrible."

The recollection of these words stopped me and made me shudder. I now perceived what gradations I had passed through within a month. I felt that Livia was right—should I descend from the height I had just attained, it would indeed be to fall lower than I was before, and perhaps to the lowest depths!

My sister in her quiet cell still aided me with her prayers, which doubtless augmented the increasing light in my soul. I tore up the note I had begun to write, and, again preparing myself to struggle and suffer more than ever, I calmly renewed the resolution I had been so near breaking. It seemed to me this slight victory, though it did not lessen my sadness, added to my strength, and made the jewel within gleam with a lustre somewhat brighter than before.

XXXIV.

I PRETENDED to be very much surprised the next morning when Lando informed me Gilbert was obliged to take his departure the following day in order to join an English friend of his who was to accompany him to Egypt and had sent a despatch he should be at Malta by the end of the week.

I recollect nothing more concerning that morning except my depression, which only increased as the day advanced. Towards night this sadness assumed a new character, and became still deeper in consequence of a letter from Lorenzo, announcing his return the following day.

He had left Milan, and was now at Bologna. He was really there this time, and not pretending to be, as when he went to Sorrento to see Donna Faustina! Oh! what bitter thoughts, what feelings of indignation, were awakened by the perusal of this letter, at once devoid of affection and sincerity! He doubtless supposed a scandal published in so many newspapers, though only the initials of the persons concerned were given, had come to my knowledge, but he was in that sort of humor in which the wrongs one has to endure produce an irritation against those who have the most to suffer in consequence. It was evident he felt some regret for the past, but there was not a symptom of repentance; and though he did not say so di-

rectly, his letter seemed intended to warn me, as he had once done, with regard to questions, advice, and promises, that he was not disposed to endure the slightest reproach. Not a word that appealed to my generosity, not one that could touch my heart! I could see nothing to cheer and console me in that direction. All was dark and cold. Such was my conviction on reading this letter. But I did not appear the less cheerful when evening came to remind me that my interior struggle would be over in a few hours, and the next day I should feel at liberty to yield without restraint to thoughts I should no longer be afraid to betray.

The large drawing-room on the ground floor which opened into the small garden after the fashion of Pompeii, with its pillared portico, had been arranged for the occasion by Lando, who had constructed a platform, ornamented with lights and flowers, where the concert he had improvised was to take place, varied by speeches.

Gilbert was to explain its object at the commencement, and at the end, Angiolina, for whom Lando had begged this exceptionally long evening, was to go around with a basket to collect the money intended for the poor people whose lives had been saved by her mother.

Lando excelled in such arrangements, and, to tell the truth, he

had left nothing here to be desired. I must also add that all of our little coterie, except Gilbert, Stella, and myself, eagerly participated in the work.

My aunt, in particular, looked with a favorable eye on this mixture of charity and amusement, which at once satisfied her kind heart and gratified her dominant passion. It seemed to her a more delightful invention had never been brought from beyond the Alps. Besides, she had that very day made a discovery which put an end to her maternal indecision with regard to her daughter's fate. This indecision, in consequence of Lando's intentions, which became more and more evident, was caused neither by the frivolity for which he might have been reproached, nor by the extravagance with which he had squandered his modest patrimony, nor by any other motive dictated by prudence, but solely by a difficulty which vanished in the twinkling of an eye as soon as my aunt discovered a fact she was before ignorant of, to wit, that Lando Landini, like a great many younger sons of good family in Italy, had a right to assume, on marrying, a title he had not heretofore borne. Oh! from that instant nothing more was wanting. She had always found Don Landolfo nearly faultless, but now he could offer her daughter the charming title of the Countess *dcl Fiore*, he was perfection itself. After such a revelation, her consent was not deferred for an instant. Lando, in the midst of the preparations he was making, had taken time to come in haste to communicate the news. This explained the air of triumph, as well as joy, with which my aunt made her appearance in the evening, and the

unusual brilliancy of Teresina's black eyes, greatly set off by the white dress and coral ornaments she wore. Her sister had also something in her manner that evening that differed a little from the unmeaning placidity which usually characterized her. She was not as pretty as Teresina, but she had a more agreeable expression, and a better right to the epithet of *simpatica* which was sometimes given her. Their faces were both flushed with the excitement produced in advance by the pleasure of singing in company when it could be done without fear and without any doubt of success. And my cousins had voices of superior quality, such as are often met with in Italy, and harmonized wonderfully together. They were, moreover, very good musicians, and though their style was not perfect, every one listened to them with pleasure, more especially the young amateur of music who had been appointed to accompany them that evening. For some time, the Baron von Brunnenberg had regarded Mariuccia in a most sentimental manner; but hitherto the handsome young Englishman, Harry Leslie, seemed to please her more than the baron, and consequently she had always treated the latter with more or less coldness. It was evident, however, that Leslie, since the evening on Mt. Vesuvius, had not a thought or look, or scarcely a word, for any body but Stella. I often wondered if this had any effect on her, as I observed her occasionally pensive air so unlike her usual self. However the case might be, Mariuccia had drawn therefrom a practical conclusion for her own personal benefit: Leslie did not care for her; she must therefore resign herself and turn to

some one else. This resignation led her to favor the baron with such smiles as he had never obtained before, so that he also was radiant, and the group around the piano presented an appearance of the utmost satisfaction. I felt a sensation of surprise as I looked at their smiling faces and heard their merry voices. I seemed to be separated from them by an impassable grate that permitted me to see and hear them, but absolutely prevented me from approaching to participate in their liveliness and joy. "Happiness . . . gaiety . . . hope . . . all these are at an end for me!" said I to myself. Nevertheless, I fulfilled all it was incumbent on me to do, and succeeded in appearing nearly the same as usual.

At length, all the company arrived, and when they had taken their places and every eye was turned towards the platform, I took Angiolina, and, going to the embrasure of a window, I sat down where I was half concealed, and took the child on my knee. The company of this angelic little creature was not only always delightful and soothing, but she had a singularly precocious instinct of the beautiful which excited my wonder and made me keep my eyes on her while she was listening to music, and even to poetry whose rhythm delighted her ear even when the words were beyond her comprehension, especially when it was her mother who was repeating it. At such times nothing was more touching than to behold the animated expression of her sparkling blue eyes and the tremulous movement of her childish mouth! . . . I now clasped her in my arms, and it seemed as if the agitation of my heart subsided as I embraced her!

The baron first played, by way

of overture, a piece of Mendelssohn's which disposed the audience to be attentive: then, after a moment's silence, Gilbert made his appearance. He was extremely pale, and seemed to be making a great effort to rise above some great moral or physical suffering. This was so evident that he might have claimed the indulgence of the audience and excused himself on the plea of a real or pretended indisposition. But presently his voice grew stronger, the orator was roused, and his manner, usually so unpretending, became what it always was when he spoke in public—imposing, brilliant, and impressive. What he said at first I cannot tell. Too many recollections crowded on my mind at once as he made his appearance, reminding me of the day when I first heard him at the Hôtel de Kergy. I remembered what I was then, what my feelings, what my hopes were. I thought of all the changes that had since taken place, and what a singular coincidence it was that he should appear before me on the day of our separation in the same way as when we met for the first time! My attention was soon drawn to the words of the speaker by the murmur of approbation, that soon increased to enthusiastic applause, with which they were received. To speak of Vesuvius at Naples, and to Neapolitans, in a way to excite their interest, requires a *tour de force*, and this feat he was able to accomplish. With the ready appreciation of ability which characterized his audience, the difficulty he had to surmount was felt, and lively spontaneous applause interrupted him at every instant, as he mingled poetry, art, and history with an originality and grace that did not permit the least appearance of pedantry to

diminish the charm of his profound, unstudied erudition. But when he finally came to the account he was appointed to give of our recent excursion, and began by describing the spot where we had witnessed the eruption together, I could not repress a thrill of emotion. I fancied his eyes had detected me in the corner where I was concealed, and when he added that *he felt in the presence of that spectacle a profound emotion the remembrance of which could never be effaced, however long the duration of his life!* I leaned my forehead against Angiolina's fair head as if everybody could understand the double meaning of his words, and for some minutes I heard nothing but the rapid beating of my heart. . . .

All at once the child looked eagerly up, and touching my cheek with her little hand to attract my attention, she said in a joyful tone:

"Listen, listen to what he is saying about mamma!"

Then everything else was forgotten for an instant but the pleasure of hearing Stella's courageous deed related in the noble, incomparable language peculiar to Gilbert. There was a burst of applause on all sides, and I was about to add mine when my attention was suddenly attracted and concentrated in an unexpected direction, as if dazzled by one of those repeated flashes of lightning that set the heavens afame, and which is distinguished from the others by a more terrible brilliancy.

It had occurred to Lando to ornament the platform with shrubs and flowers, in order to conceal from the spectators those who were to take part in the performance till it was their turn to appear. Stella was in this way concealed from everybody but me. From the place to

which I had betaken myself I could see her distinctly, and follow every movement she made, without her being aware of it. I was soon surprised and struck with the effect of the address she was listening to. It was not merely attention; it was not interest; it was a breathless emotion which contracted her features, and to such a degree that I thought she was going to faint. I had already risen to go to her assistance, when I was struck with a sudden idea which nailed me to the spot—an idea that no sooner crossed my mind than it became a certainty, and caused me such terrible anguish that I was frightened. I looked at her steadily, trying to imagine and read her thoughts, and while penetrating to the depths of her heart, I felt mine sink within me. Alas! Why should the discovery I thought I had made thus cause me to tremble and shudder? Why did it seem as if I had been struck by an arrow that pierced me to the heart?

I endeavored to overcome the repugnance I was so weak as to feel in my soul. Yes, I tried to regard Stella in the new light that had just dawned on me, and to consider him in this same light—him! . . . I tried to say to myself without shrinking that before me was the very one of whom I had spoken the evening before; who was at once beautiful, good, noble-hearted, and worthy of him—and one whom he could love without fear, without scruple, without remorse. I tried to do all this, and like every effort to rise above self, this did me good, perhaps, and rendered me stronger; but I did not gain the victory.

As soon as Gilbert finished speaking, I watched him, in spite of myself, while Stella's name was mingled with his in the enthusiastic ac-

clamations of the audience, and—shall I avow it?—I noticed with pleasure that he left the platform without the least thought of approaching her. He slipped away as quickly as he could through a little door that opened on the portico, and from the shadowy recess where I was sitting, I could see him in the moonlight leaning against a pillar in the attitude of one who is reposing after some great effort or long constraint.

I was for some time incapable of giving the least attention to what was going on around me. I vaguely listened to *A te sacrai Regina*, to which Mariuccia's fine contralto voice gave wonderful expression, and after this duet from *Semiramis*, various other pieces were played by the baron. One of these gave me a thrill, and brought me back to a sense not only of the present but of the past. It was the air of Chopin's which Diana de Kergy played at Paris on that other farewell occasion! Everything to-night seemed combined to overwhelm me with recollections and emotion! I could hardly bear to listen to this music, it so overpowered me with its heartrending, passionate character. My eyes, in spite of my efforts, were already filled with tears when the young amateur abruptly stopped and struck up a waltz from Strauss, with so much spirit and *brio* that Angiolina jumped down, as if drawn by some irresistible impulse, and began to whirl around, holding her little dress up with both hands. All those in the assembly who were still in their teens seemed strongly tempted to follow her example; but the waltz soon ended, silence was restored, and Angiolina returned to my side as Stella, in her turn, made her appearance.

The object of the *soirée* sufficient-

ly accounted for the acclamations with which she was received—a marked homage to the noble deed that had just been eulogized in such eloquent terms. When these subsided, the silence became profound.

Stella remained motionless while all these demonstrations were going on around her in her honor, and did not seem to be aware of them. I can see her still in her white dress, the flowing sleeves of which displayed her hands and arms. Her only ornament was a circlet of gold, which confined the waving masses of her thick, brown hair. She did not look paler than usual, for her complexion, of dazzling whiteness, rarely had any color; her eyelashes and eyebrows were as dark as her hair, and her eyes, when nothing animated her, were of a rather dull gray; but at the least emotion the pupils seemed to dilate, and deepen in hue, and then nothing could surpass their brilliancy! This change was especially remarkable when she exercised the natural talent for declamation which she possessed without having ever cultivated it. Her sense of the poetic was profound and accurate, and her voice, full and sonorous, was precisely adapted to express what she felt at the moment in her heart. To this were added simple, natural gestures, which the mere movement of her beautiful hands and arms always rendered noble and graceful. There was no affectation about her, and yet her face, usually animated by extreme gaiety, possessed a strange tragical power. Such was Stella's talent—a sufficiently faithful reflection of the character of her soul.

During the noisy manifestations that greeted her appearance, she was apparently very calm, as I have just described her; but her

hands were clasped nervously together, and an almost imperceptible movement of her lips indicated more agitation than she manifested outwardly. But this repressed emotion added to the very charm of her voice when she began with incomparable grace a soñnet from Zappi; and when, striking another chord, she repeated a scene from one of Manzoni's finest tragedies, there was a genuine thrill of admiration in the audience. I noticed poor Harry Leslie, in particular, who was touched, excited, amazed. I looked around for Gilbert—and (pardon me, O my God!—forgive me, Stella!) I was glad to see he was not present. The very power which each of them possessed in a different way of moving an audience seemed to establish a relationship between them, the bare thought of which made me suffer, and this suffering was as harrowing as remorse!

Finally, Stella began the canto at the end of the *Divina Commedia*, which commences with this prayer—certainly the most beautiful ever inspired by genius and piety: "*O Virgin Madre! figlia del tuo Figlio!*"* At that moment Gilbert reappeared. He did not enter the room, but remained leaning against the door. Nevertheless, I saw a slight flush pass over Stella's brow; I heard her voice tremble; and I knew she was aware of his presence and had lost some of her self-control. As for him, I saw he was surprised and astonished. He added his applause to that of the whole as sensibly. But when they all rose at the end to crowd around Stella, his eyes turned in a different direction, and it was evident he thought of her no longer.

* O Virgin Mother, daughter of thy Son!

At that instant, little Angiolina, who was leaning against my shoulder, mutely contemplating her mother, and only saying from time to time in a low voice, "How beautiful! Isn't it beautiful?" as if she were listening to some musical strain, was borne away by Harry Leslie, who, as was appropriate, had been appointed to accompany the little *quêteuse*. There was now a bustle and general confusion, as is often the case after prolonged silence and attention, and everybody seemed wild with gaiety. To this merriment was added the noise of a deafening march which the baron played, as he said, by way of accompaniment to the triumphant progress of the child borne around the room on Leslie's shoulder to receive the contributions that were to end the *soirée*.

The contrast between the state of my mind and all this tumult, animation, and gaiety, only served to heighten the agitation of my soul to the utmost. All the doors and windows of the room were open, and I mechanically went out and leaned for a moment against the same pillar where I had seen Gilbert only a short time before. While standing there, I suddenly heard his voice beside me:

"Adieu! madame," said he in a low, trembling tone.

"Adieu, Gilbert! May heaven protect you!" I replied, extending my hand. He took it, pressed it to his lips, gave it a slight pressure, and that was all. . . . He was gone! I followed him with my eyes, by the bright moonlight, till he disappeared under the trees of the avenue.

I remained motionless in the place where I was, looking alternately at the garden around me bathed in the light of the moon,

and at the brilliantly illuminated *salon* within. And while my eyes wandered from one to the other, it seemed as if everything before me disappeared never to return, that these bright lights were about to be extinguished never to be re-lit again, this numerous assembly dispersed never to be reunited, and it was the last time I was to mingle in the gay world surrounded by all the display that wealth

could afford. The impression was singular; but what is certain, I felt at that very moment all my happiness was over, that which was dangerous as well as that which was legitimate, pleasure as well as repose, joy as well as peace, memory as well as hope! It was a moment of agony, but the sufferings of such agony, however terrible they may be, are they not, like a mother's throes, the signs and prelude of life?

xxxv.

When I returned to the drawing-room, I found scarcely any one left. Leslie came to tell me Stella had gone away without bidding me good night, because she was in a hurry to take Angiolina home as soon as the collection was ended. Presently nobody remained. Silence once more reigned, and I found myself alone, face to face with myself!

But I by no means experienced the happiness that so often results from the accomplishment of a duty, or the consummation of a sacrifice. On the contrary, I felt a desolation which was the prelude of a state of mind which was to render the following days gloomy beyond any I ever spent in my life—gloomy! yes, as the profound darkness of night just before the dawn!

While Gilbert remained, I did not allow myself to analyze my feelings for fear of shaking my resolution. I was able to maintain it to the end; but as soon as he was gone, I gave free course to every thought that could aggravate my sufferings. I now experienced that isolation which, from childhood, I had dreaded more than death! Lorenzo no longer cared for me, I should never behold Gilbert again, and the friendship of Stella, the

only one who comprehended and pitied me, I was not sure of preserving!

I now began to recall, and study, so to speak, all that had taken place during the evening just at an end, but this only seemed to increase the conviction that had taken such strong possession of my mind. I felt determined, however, to ascertain the truth. I would satisfy my mind. I would question her till she told me exactly all that was passing in her heart.

But Stella, with all her gaiety, was not a person who could readily be induced to make a confidential disclosure of her most secret thoughts. Without the least disimulation, she was impenetrable. She knew how to enter fully into the feelings of others—their joys and, above all, their sufferings. But if, on the other hand, any one sought to participate in hers, a smile, the opening of her large eyes, or a slight movement of her lips and shoulders, seemed to forbid looking beneath the serene expression of her smiling face. The truth was, she thought very little about herself. There was no duplicity in the habit she had acquired of never lifting the veil that concealed the inner workings of her heart, for

she did not try to raise it herself, and was by no means curious to fathom all that was passing there.

When I saw her again, I found her, therefore, nearly the same as usual—a little graver, perhaps, and somewhat more quiet, but that was all. As to questioning her, I did not dare to, and the query soon rose in my mind: Have I read her heart aright? And to this immediately succeeded another: Has she read mine? I dwelt on these questions a long time without being able to answer them to my satisfaction.

What inclined me to decide in the affirmative was the care we both took to avoid mentioning Gilbert's name, the tacit agreement we made not to prolong our interview, and the facility with which, under some trifling pretext, she excused herself from driving out with me, though she consented to let me take her little Angiolina.

I set off, therefore, with the child, and drove beyond Posillipo where the road descends to the water's edge. There I left the carriage, and taking the child, I went down to the shore and seated myself so near the sea that the waves died softly away at my feet. I had a particular fancy for this spot. Seated there in full view of Nisita, with Ischia, Procida, Capo Miseno, and Baja in the distance, Pozzuoli at the right, and the heights of Posillipo and Camaldoli at the left and behind, I seemed to be a thousand leagues from the inhabited world, in a spot where it was easier than anywhere else to forget all the rest of the universe.

While I sat there silently gazing around me, Angiolina was running about gathering sea-shells to fill the little basket she had brought for the purpose. Occasionally she

stopped and clapped her hands with delight as she looked around. More than ever did I at that moment envy Stella the happiness that prevented her from feeling the isolation and intolerable void in which I was plunged! I envied her, and forgot to pity her! I forgot, moreover, to tremble for her! One would have thought the saying: "*Aux légers plaisirs les souffrances légères; aux grands bonheurs les maux inouïs,*" or, at least, the evident truth they contain, had never struck my mind!

At that time I only dreamed of human happiness under every conceivable form—a happiness that seemed to be accorded and permitted to others, but of which I was for ever deprived. And while Angiolina continued to ramble about, not far off, I ceased admiring the spectacle before me, and suddenly burying my face in my hands, I burst into tears. At the same instant I felt Angiolina's little arms around my neck.

"Zia Gina!" she exclaimed (she had heard her mother call me Gina, as well as sister, and composed therefrom the name she always gave me). "Zia Gina, what makes you cry?"

"I am sad, Lina," said I, my tears falling on her beautiful fair curls.

"Why?"

"I cannot tell you."

"Can you tell the good God?"

What a singular question! . . . She made me blush, and, after a moment's reflection, I replied somewhat evasively:

"One can tell him everything, Lina, for he is our Father."

"Yes, I know he is our Father; I call him so every day."

Her attention was diverted an instant by a butterfly she saw float-

ing by. She watched it till it flew away, and then resumed :

"Then, my dear Zia Gina, you must pray God to console you."

"Pray for me, *carina*."

After some reflection, she said : "I only know two prayers—the Our Father and Ave Maria: which shall I say for you?"

"Say both of them."

"Yes, certainly: Our Father first; I like it so much."

And there on the shore she folded her hands, raised her eyes, as blue as the heavens to which she raised them, and with her clear, silvery voice softly repeated the divine words. If ever there were lips on earth worthy of being the echo of that voice which once uttered this prayer that we might learn it, they were certainly the innocent lips now repeating it beside me! I too clasped my hands and joined in her prayer.

When it was ended, she stopped a moment with a thoughtful air, and then repeated: "Deliver us from all evil."

"But, as I am praying for you, ought not I to say to Our Father: Deliver Zia Gina from all evil?"

"Yes, my darling," exclaimed I, embracing her: "yes, pray always in this way for me, and may God hear and bless you!"

Her angelic face, her piety and innocence, completely diverted my mind from my sorrows. I only felt an infinite joy at not having rendered myself unworthy to hear the words she had just uttered. I had suffered; I still suffered, of course; but I had prayed, and still prayed, to be delivered from temptation and sin, and it seemed to me a ray from heaven had fallen on me in answer to this angel's prayer!

But this impression, though lively and consoling, was only mo-

mentary. I had to return to the reality of life, and this reality was painful. It became much more so the following day when Lorenzo at last returned.

He did not, of course, appear like a man who returns to the fireside he loves and respects. Nor could he be expected to present himself in the attitude of a penitent. I was far from being prepared, however, for the stand he took and the complete change I found in him, but Lorenzo had been endowed by Divine Providence with such rare gifts that, in giving himself up to evil instead of good impulses, he had to suffer from the law which condemns those to stray further away and fall lower who would perhaps have become guides to others had they not erred from the right way. The serious errors into which he had fallen, less excusable than they would have been at any other epoch of his life, were this time accompanied by a shamelessness and indifference to scandal that at once wounded and disgusted me. The consciousness of faults he would not acknowledge caused him insupportable uneasiness, and this produced a complete change in the expression of his face, his language, and even in his manners, formerly so dignified and courteous, but now haughty and not unfrequently rude. But what was specially evident was, the fatal fascination he did not cease to feel. The fact was, he had not been driven from her by disgust: repentance and duty had not led him to return to me. She who had forsaken him still reigned in his heart, and the influence I had over him so short a time before, was now utterly destroyed!

All this was clearly perceptible from the first day of his return. I

saw he was even rather irritated than pleased at having no reproach to make me. In fact, he did not propose peace, but imposed it, on the condition of absolute silence on my part. The slightest reproach from me, I felt, would have been the cause of a violent scene and perhaps of open rupture!

Such was the aspect my life assumed at Lorenzo's return. Will any one be astonished at the revolt I felt in my heart in spite of my apparent submission, which was only a mixture of pride and disdain? Will any one wonder at the harrowing regrets, dangerous recollections, and profound discouragement which threw me into the deepest melancholy, and sometimes into utter despair? I began my life over again in imagination with Gilbert, and dwelt on what it might have been, that I might suffer the more for what it was!

This remembrance seemed to be my only resource: these vain desires and regrets my only solace. I gave myself up to them with my whole heart, and thus, while I considered myself irreproachable, I was as much separated from Lorenzo as he was from me, and I allowed myself to live interiorly in a world over which I had no scruple in allowing another to reign almost absolutely!

The following Saturday I was at the grate of the convent parlor a long time before my usual hour. The anguish of my soul was at its height, and for the first time, without regard to the place where I was, and perhaps I ought to say, to her who listened to me, I made known all my troubles to Livia, not only Lorenzo's new offences, but also my other trials, my inclinations, my regrets, and what at the same time I called my "courageous sacrifice."

She turned pale as she listened to me, and an expression of grief, such as I had never seen her wear, came over her face, which remained anxious, even when I told her that she unawares had given me the strength to accomplish it.

"So much the better," said she; adding, with a grave smile, "If that is the case, I certainly did not this time play the part of a *jettatrice*! . . . But, Ginevra, you escaped a less fearful peril the day I saw you borne by that furious horse towards the abyss. You were saved when I saw you again, whereas to-day . . ."

"To-day? . . . Are you not satisfied? Have I not obeyed what I felt were your wishes?"

"Yes, my poor Gina, you have made an effort, a courageous effort; and yet you deceive yourself like a child. Lorenzo certainly ought to conduct himself very differently; but even if he did, you would still be deprived of the happiness you dream of. As to that other mirage," continued she with a shudder. "O merciful heavens! do you not see whence comes the light that has caused it? Ginevra, I can only say one thing to you—what I have said before: pray!"

"I pray every day."

"With fervor?"

"Yes, Livia, with all my heart, I assure you, I pray as well as I know how. I tell you the truth."

As I uttered these words, a celestial smile came over her face for the first time since the beginning of our conversation, and she exclaimed:

"O dearest sister!" . . . and then stopped.

Rather vexed than consoled by the manner in which she received my communications, I remained

with my forehead leaning against the *grille*, feeling for the first time how truly it separated us, that my sister felt no pity for me, did not render me justice as she ought, and that she knew neither the world, nor its difficulties, nor its temptations, nor its pains. My tears fell like rain as I made these reflections, but it seemed as if Livia, usually so compassionate, beheld me weep with indifference.

All at once she asked :

"Ginevra, is it long since you went to confession?"

I abruptly raised my head, my tears ceased to flow, and I wiped my eyes with a gesture of impatience. It was certain Livia could find nothing to say that did me any good. I made no reply.

"You will not tell me. Why not, *carina*?"

Was I really out of humor with her—with Livia? And on the point of showing it? . . . Oh! no; I at once felt it was impossible. Besides, the touch of severity that chilled me had disappeared. She now spoke in a tone I never had refused to listen to. I therefore replied without any further entreaty:

"Yes, Livia, longer than usual."

No sooner had I uttered these words, than a lively color suffused my whole face. It at once occurred to me that the time corresponded exactly with the length of Gilbert's visit at Naples. Livia did not observe my confusion, and calmly resumed :

"Listen, Gina. You believe, as well as I, that the Sacrament of Penance is a remedy, do you not? It has been called, I think, 'the divine prescription for the maladies of the soul,' and you are conscious, I trust, that your soul is really ill."

"Oh! yes, my soul, my heart, my mind, my body, my whole being! O Livia! I suffer every way!"

"Well, if you were physically ill, you would certainly consult the best physician in the city, and, who knows? if there were a better one still at the other end of Europe, you would perhaps, like many others, undertake a long journey to consult him as to the remedy."

"Perhaps so! What then?"

"Listen, dear Gina. I have just thought of a piece of advice to give you, and as it has occurred to me in a moment of pity for you, when my whole heart is filled with affection and sympathy, perhaps it is a good inspiration you would do well to follow."

"O Livia!" I exclaimed, greatly affected, for I recognized the accent of affection I had been so doubtful about—an affection more than human, because it was an emanation of divine charity: "Yes, tell me, dear sister, what it is. Say anything you please. Command me, and I will obey you."

She proceeded to inform me that a saintly monk had recently arrived at Naples who was universally known and respected on account of his extensive knowledge, and was remarkable for the unpretending simplicity of his manners. His words went to the heart, led sinners to return to God, and made those who were pious better than they were before.

"Go to him humbly, I beseech you, and open your heart to him before God—your whole heart. I feel a conviction he will be able to give you the remedy you need, and if you have the courage to apply this remedy, whatever it be, I feel the assurance, Ginevra, you will be healed."

XXXVI.

Let those who do not wish to enter the region into which I am about to lead my readers, now lay aside this book. I assure them, however, there is nothing in the previous portion of this narrative more strictly true than what I am going to relate. I affirm, moreover, that it refers to a point that interests every Christian soul; I might say, every human soul, but I know beforehand that they alone will comprehend me who have faith in these words: "I believe in God the Father Almighty," that is to say, they who with the Catholic Church firmly believe His Omnipotence is present, living and acting in our midst, and there is not a single instant in which the material and spiritual world, the world of nature and the inner world of the human soul, cannot feel its supernatural and *miraculous* effects. At the mere sight of this word, I suppose every sceptical, incredulous, or scornful reader has taken the alarm and made his escape, and I shall henceforth address only those who speak, or at least comprehend, the language I am about to employ.

I left the convent without deciding on the hour for following Livia's advice, and was already on my way home when I took the sudden resolution to proceed without any delay to the church she had indicated. This church was one of the finest in Naples, the only one, perhaps, in which the eye is not offended by any of the incongruities so often found in Italy between the beautiful proportions, the marbles, the frescos that adorn the walls, and certain objects of devotion whose choice or execution indicates more piety than

taste. Here everything harmonized, and this harmony was favorable to devotion. I took a chair and knelt against it on the marble pavement; then, according to the Neapolitan custom at confession, I took off my hat and threw over my head a scarf of black lace I wore over my silk dress, and patiently waited for others to enter the deserted church. It was nearly three o'clock.

I did not have to wait long. As soon as the clock struck, I saw quite a number of men and women of every rank and age, as well as young ladies and even children, come in and gather around the confessional, near which by chance I had stationed myself. I turned towards a lady who knelt beside me, and asked the name of the confessor she was awaiting. She looked up with an air of surprise.

"Father Egidio di San Mauro, of course," said she. "Do you not know his confessional?"

Father Egidio was the name of the priest to whom my sister had directed me. Chance had led me to the spot I wished to find. I was obliged to wait a long time; but this delay, and the profound silence around, aided me in concentrating my mind on the act I was going to perform, and enabled me, I think, to make a good preparation. Besides, I had already gained a victory over myself by the very act of coming here, for I had been obliged to surmount a mixture of timidity and embarrassment one always feels about going to a strange confessor.

At length the priest we were waiting for made his appearance. He came slowly out of the sacristy and proceeded directly to the high

altar, where he knelt for some time in prayer. He then rose, and, crossing the church, passed before me on his way to the confessional. He was of lofty stature, but bowed down by years and still more by that sanctity which does not spare the body. His white hair and bald forehead gave his mild, delicate features a grave, imposing aspect, which at once inspired respect, though it was impossible to feel any fear.

I ought to have been the first to approach, as I arrived before the others; but as soon as Father Egidio seated himself in the confessional, which, according to the Italian style, was only closed by a low door, he perceived the children awaiting him, and, leaving the door open, he made them a sign to approach. One by one they presented themselves before him. He bent down his head as he addressed them, and the innocent faces raised towards him were marked by a pious attention that was touching. He smiled occasionally, as he listened to them, and the hand they kissed when they were done, he afterwards placed on their heads in benediction.

When the children had finished I was obliged to wait still longer, for a young man brushed hastily by me and fell on his knees in the place they left vacant, and this time the confession was long. Father Egidio, resting both hands on the shoulders of his new penitent, bent his head to listen without interrupting him, and when the young man ceased speaking, the advice he gave in return must have touched his penitent's heart, for, as he listened, he bent his head lower and lower towards the old priest's knees, and when he rose his eyes were inundated with tears.

At last my turn came, and I knelt in the place usually taken at confession. My voice trembled as I began, but grew stronger by degrees, and I continued with clearness and the wish to be sincere. My troubles, alas! were closely connected with my faults, and I not only opened my heart and soul, but laid before him my entire life, feeling, as I did so, the relief there is in the avowal of one's weaknesses in confession that can be compared to no human confidence, however great the wisdom or sympathy that wins it. He murmured two or three times as he listened, "Poor child!" but did not otherwise interrupt me till I had finished.

The words he addressed me then were the mildest and yet most powerful that ever roused the human heart to a sense of duty. But when he finally told me that though I had banished him whose presence was so dangerous to my soul, I must likewise banish his memory with equal resolution; that the recollections in which I still indulged without scruple ought to be resisted, overcome, rooted out, and rejected, I felt an insurmountable repugnance, and replied :

"No, father, I cannot do it."

He again repeated, "Poor child!" and then said in a tone of mingled compassion and kindness :

"You are not willing, then, to give God the place he has a right to in your heart?"

I did not understand his meaning, and replied :

"Father, I cannot help what I think and feel, or what I suffer."

Without losing anything of his mildness, but with an authority that subdued my rebellious spirit, he said :

"I know, my child, what is in your power, and what does not de-

pend on your will; but in the name of Him who now speaks to you through me, I ask you to repeat with a sincere heart these words, which comprise all I have just said:

"O my God! root out of my heart everything that separates it from Thee."

These words, the accent with which they were uttered, and the prayer that I have no doubt rose from the depths of the holy soul from which they sprang, inspired me with the wish and strength to obey.

O my God! enable me now to make others understand what then took place in my soul.

I leaned my head against my clasped hands, and after a moment's silence, during which I summoned all the strength of my will, I slowly repeated with the utmost sincerity the words he dictated:

"O my God! root out of my heart everything that separates it from Thee." . . .

O merciful, divine Goodness! how shall I speak of Thee? how tell of thy marvellous grace and love? While uttering these words, before they were even ended, I felt touched by some strange, mysterious, supernatural influence. My heart and soul seemed filled with light. My whole being was transformed. I was inundated with a joy that could not be expressed in

human language, and the source of this joy, the sensible cause, which I still feel, and shall never cease to feel, was the conviction made audible in some miraculous manner that *God loves me!*

God loves me! Yes, I heard these words. I comprehended their entire signification. *The Veil was forever withdrawn.* The mysterious enigma of my heart was solved as clearly and obviously as my eyes beheld the light of day.

I loved, not as we try, but in vain, to love our fellow-creatures; I loved with *all* the strength of my heart! and with so much strength that I could not have loved more without dying! . . .

All human language is inadequate, I know, to speak of supernatural grace. I can only stammer as I attempt it, and will no longer dwell on the ineffable moment which wrought an entire transformation in my life. I no longer recollect what words I then uttered, or what was said to me. I only remember the holy absolution I received with bowed head, and these words, afterwards uttered in a tone of emotion: "Be calm, my child, and go in peace."

I had knelt down overwhelmed with sadness. I rose up so happy that I suffered from the great intensity of a joy my heart was too weak to endure!

XXXVII.

Long years have passed by since that day, and perhaps long years still await me; but whatever be the duration of my life nothing will ever efface the remembrance—not of the moment I have just described, for that moment is always present, it can never become a memory of

the past—but of the effect which the sight of the earth, the sky, and the sea had on me when I issued from the church where I had received so great a blessing. Everything seemed to have assumed a new aspect, a new meaning, a more glorious signification; for the torrent

of happiness in my soul seemed diffused over all nature! I no longer wished for anything. I had found all. I was freed from all anxiety. Hope had become certitude—a certitude more complete than can be derived from the surest of earthly things; for great indeed is the certitude of that assurance which *nothing* can deprive us of, except through our own will! . . .

Nothing could quench the source from which sprang my joy, or deprive me of its benefits: *nothing*, for my will was henceforth absorbed, and, so to speak, *lost* in the most ardent love!

To love with strength, disinterestedness, and passion the worthiest object on earth, and learn all at once we could not be deprived of it without the consent of our own heart, would not this induce us to utter the word *never* with an absolute meaning that the things of this world do not admit of? It was thus God gave me the grace to love, to feel sure of loving always, sure of the impossibility of ever being deprived of the object of my love!

The beauty of the natural world around me now seemed a mere ray of this joy. Never had I found it so lovely. And yet (those whom I *alone* address now will understand this, however contradictory it may appear) I felt an almost equal disgust for all created things, an ardent desire to renounce everything, a profound contempt for all that had hitherto seemed worthy of so much esteem. Wealth, honor, dress, display, luxury, even the beauty, so uncertain, which I prized so much—they all lost their importance and became worthless in my eyes, not through satiety, or a feeling of melancholy, but through the disgust one naturally feels for the mediocre after seeing the beautiful, and for

the beautiful after seeing the perfect!

On the other hand, in spite of this fountain of inexhaustible joy, I by no means imagined I was released from suffering; and what was also strange, perhaps, I did not desire to be. I already felt there was a lively, poignant, and sometimes terrible suffering inherent in the divine love I had just begun to experience. He who has described this love better than any other human being, doubtless because he felt it in a greater degree; he who more than six centuries ago wrote the following words: "Nothing is stronger than love, nothing more generous, nothing more pleasant, nothing fuller or better in heaven or earth. . . . When weary it is not tired, when straitened is not constrained, when frightened is not disturbed, but like a lively flame and a torch all on fire, it mounts upward and securely passes through all opposition;"* he who uttered these and so many other burning words, likewise said these: "There is no living in love without some pain or sorrow." I knew it, and my heart was as ready to embrace the one as the other. As to the ordinary trials of life, it seemed to me I had sufficient courage to encounter them all, and that henceforth I should have nothing in the world to fear, nothing to complain of. . . .

To the reader who comprehends me, and knows all this is perfectly true, I need not say that the state I have just described, though a blessed and rare one, has in all ages, as well as ours, been one to which a great number of souls have arrived by slow but natural progression. When, therefore, I speak of

* *Following of Christ*, book iii. chap. v.

this as *miraculous* and supernatural, I merely apply the word to the sudden wonderful grace which shortened the way for me, making me pass in an instant from a totally different frame of mind to a plenitude of faith and happiness !

And now . . . how did they who were much more closely interwoven with my life than the natural world around me, appear in this new light ? How did I now regard them in my heart ?—Lorenzo ! Livia ! Stella ! Gilbert ! What were the feelings of my heart and soul towards them now that I was so suddenly brought to see and feel what was clear and right ? . . .

In order to express my sentiments with regard to them, I will employ an illustration that may seem obscure, and yet I know no better way of making myself understood. It seemed to me that all the pure, tender, legitimate, and noble feelings of my heart found in this luminous flame a new and powerful aliment, while all others were consumed by this flame as quickly as pernicious weeds cast into a fiery furnace !

Nothing, therefore, was changed in my feelings towards Livia and Stella, unless I loved them more tenderly than before, one seeming more than ever an angel, and the other the dearest of friends !

As to Lorenzo, the change was great, sudden, and profound ! . . . My affection for him, which he had mortally wounded and extinguished, was now rekindled at the divine source of all true love, and became equal to that I had felt at the time of my brightest hopes. The wish I once so ardently felt seemed now to be the only one worthy of occupying my mind. What did a little more or less of human love matter to me now ? As Livia had predicted, my heart was satiated ; I was

rich, even if I did not possess the affection of a single heart on earth. It was, therefore, no longer through a selfish thirst for happiness I now wished to set his soul at liberty, but from a desire a thousand times more ardent—so ardent that it seemed to become my only passion !

And now, Gilbert ! . . . how shall I speak of him ? How, in the light of this divine flame, did the dangerous attachment, the enervating, subtle affection that had so absorbed my mind; appear to me now ? And those vague, false hopes — those impossible dreams — those harrowing regrets ? And my foolish and culpable longing for his return ?

All this was consumed like the pernicious weeds I have just spoken of, and I distinctly saw the abyss on the edge of which I had been walking. I turned away from the danger I had escaped with terror. I felt with profound gratitude that I was saved ! . . . and like one who has escaped from the perils of the sea, I looked back with horror on the waves that had so recently threatened to engulf me.

This impression was so strong that it began to render the memory odious that I so recently thought the only joy of my life—the joy I could not make up my mind to deny myself. The miraculous effect of the divine mercy had been in answer to the very essence of my prayer ; the obstacle that separated me from God had been completely rooted out of my heart. In this respect, more than any other, I felt changed and transformed. But this powerful impression was modified by degrees, and I was soon able to see Gilbert in so clear and true a light as to think of him henceforth without the least disturbance of mind. I now thought of his

danger, and the thought filled me with regret. I perceived my secret participation, the primary, and often the only, cause of others' faults, from which it is so rare to be wholly exempt in such cases, and I prayed God to pardon me and heal the wounds of his soul as perfectly as he had healed mine !

Perhaps I have dwelt too long

on this event—the greatest, the only great event of my life—and the effect it had on me in so many ways. But it was necessary to describe the transfigured state of my soul in order to explain what I still have to relate—this day having, thank heaven ! set its ineffaceable seal on every succeeding day of my life.

xxxviii.

For several days I had some difficulty in concealing the irrepressible joy I betrayed in my face in spite of my efforts, and which there was apparently nothing to justify.

Lorenzo's attitude, in fact, remained the same. He continued, as he had done since his return, to appear only at the hour of his repasts. A part of the morning he remained shut up in his studio, which he now rarely allowed me to enter, and he spent all his evenings abroad. Mario had returned to Sicily ; Stella had not yet wholly resumed her usual ease with me, and Lando, absorbed in his own affairs, was less interested than usual in mine. ,

Our customary reunions continued, however, and the same visitors assembled every evening, as before. I frequently heard my aunt loudly lament the departure of *quel Francese simpatico*, and declare how much il Kergy was missed by everybody. In fact, Gilbert's name was continually repeated, and I sometimes thought Stella was astonished at my calmness, which was incomprehensible to her, whereas, on the contrary, I was not in the least surprised at her silence, which I understood perfectly. But we continued our tacit agreement never to speak of him to each other. Several days passed in this way,

during which Livia was the only person from whom I concealed nothing. How great her joy was when, on seeing me again, she read with a single look the recovered peace of my soul, it is useless to say here. From that time we seemed to be united by a stronger tie than that of blood, and to have become more than sisters. But when, in the transport of my new joy, I declared that the luxuries of my beautiful home now seemed a burden and a fetter, and that I preferred the austere simplicity which surrounded her, she at once checked me.

" Our tastes should correspond with our vocation, Gina. Yours is not to leave the world, or even to lay aside its superfluities. Endeavor to please Lorenzo, to win him back. That is your mission, which is as high as any other; and when you feel your former affection for him revive in your heart, believe me, *carina*, it will meet with no opposition from the love God has revealed to your soul ! You have dreamed of great things for Lorenzo. Come, Gina, courage ! now is the time to realize them ! "

It was thus she led me back to a great but evident truth. I comprehended it in spite of the different feelings I had experienced, and trusted time would give me an op-

portunity of winning back my husband's heart, which was even sorcer than mine had ever been. My eyes were often filled with tears, in spite of myself, as I saw the alteration in his face, his anxious look, his brow furrowed before the time, and all the sad indications by which a soul that is tarnished betrays the reaction which has such an injurious effect on physical beauty itself. But the time was gone by when it seemed possible to form some project, and achieve it in a day. I had learned the value of the words *patience and silence*.

I rose now every morning as soon as it was light, and went with Ottavia to the church of a neighboring convent to seek strength for the day and, so to speak, draw fresh joy from the inexhaustible fountain. I afterwards carried myself the alms which, in my pride and indolence, I had hitherto been contented to distribute by her hands. This was the only outward change in my way of life, and it was one that nobody perceived. But it was not quite the same with the change that had unconsciously taken place in my language, manners, and even in the expression of my face, and though Lorenzo seldom had an opportunity of noticing me, I soon fancied he had recovered a certain ease of manner towards me. Until now, he had been, not only wounded in his pride and passion, but especially humiliated in my presence; and it must be acknowledged that the coldness and disdain that constituted the mute form of my reproach were not calculated to conciliate him. The freezing haughtiness of his air in return, which seemed to add outrage to perjury, increased my exasperation to the utmost, and irritated me more than his actual offences did

at the time I gave myself up with desperation to the thought of Gilbert, as a kind of intoxication which made me at once forget my grief and my anger. Now I no longer sought to escape from the one, and the other was wholly extinguished. This new state of my soul produced an outward calmness and serenity I had never possessed before.

Lorenzo's quick, penetrating eye soon detected the change without being able to imagine the cause. One day, after looking attentively at me for a moment, a sad, thoughtful expression came over his face, and I thought there was something like affection and respect in his look.

This did not prevent him, however, from spending the evening away from home, and I anxiously followed him in spirit as usual, not daring to utter a word to detain him, and still less venture to question him. A whole week passed in this way, in the vague hope of finding some means of influencing him, but nothing of the kind happened. All at once, one morning, by some extraordinary accident we happened to be alone a moment together, and after causing me some anxiety by the gloomy expression on his face, he gave me a great but pleasant surprise by saying :

"What would you say, Ginevra, if I proposed your taking a journey to Sicily with me?"

I uttered an exclamation of joy.

"What a question, Lorenzo! You know well nothing could give me more pleasure than to see my father again, and Messina, the dear old palace, and . . ."

Here I stopped, too much affected to continue, and fearing to awaken remembrances that might seem like a reproach. He perceived it and was grateful.

"Well, my lawsuit is about to be tried. Don Fabrizio desires my presence, and I would not for anything in the world renounce the pleasure of hearing him plead. We will start next week, then, if you are willing."

This proposition caused me the liveliest and most unexpected pleasure. To leave Naples! To go with him! and to a place where, more easily than anywhere else, it seemed to me I could overcome the fatal remembrance in his heart I had to struggle against! And from there—who could tell?—induce him perhaps to go to some distant land; persuade him to let me follow him, go with him to the ends of the earth, if necessary, in search of the pure air he needed to restore him to health! All this crossed my mind in the twinkling of an eye, and for the first time for a long while I saw a ray of hope before me.

When I announced the projected journey to Stella with a satisfaction I made no attempt to conceal, she looked at me with an air of surprise.

"You have entirely forgiven Lorenzo, then?" said she.

"Yes."

"Then I conclude he has at last acknowledged his offences and begged your pardon."

"No."

"No? . . . In that case, Ginevra, you have greatly changed."

"Yes, a blessed change has come over me."

"I have noticed it for some days, and if I ask what has produced it, will you answer me sincerely?"

"Yes, without hesitation. I will tell you the plain truth."

And without turning my eyes away from hers, which were fas-

tened attentively on me, I calmly continued:

"Between my violent indignation against Lorenzo, and my strong fancy for Gilbert, I went very far astray from God, Stella. A single instant of extraordinary grace enabled me to see this. Everything is clear to me now. I no longer seek happiness: I possess it."

The moment Stella heard me pronounce Gilbert's name, which we had invariably avoided of late, the pupils of her eyes dilated, and, as I went on, took that intensity of color and expression which all emotion imparted to them. But she merely replied:

"I do not wholly understand you, Ginevra, I confess, but I see you are happy and courageous: that is sufficient."

After a moment's silence, I resumed:

"And will you allow me to ask you a question in my turn, Stella?"

She blushed without making any reply. I hastened to say that my question only concerned Harry Leslie. At his name, she resumed her usual expression, and a double smile beamed from her eyes and lips.

"Certainly, ask anything you please."

"Well, he came yesterday with a gloomy air to announce his departure. Am I wrong in thinking you have something to do with it?"

"No," replied she, smiling, "not if it is true he cannot remain in Naples without marrying me, for I have not otherwise ordered him to go away."

Desirous of drawing her out on this point, I continued:

"But, after all, Mr. Leslie is kind, handsome, excellent, very wealthy they say, and of a good family. You are very difficult, Stella."

"Yes, perhaps so," replied she with agitation and a kind of impatience. Then she continued in a melancholy tone of anguish :

"Ginevra, never speak to me again, I beg, either of happiness or the future. I do not know as I shall ever be any happier than I am now, but I know I can be less so. . . . Oh! may what I now possess never be taken away from me. I ask nothing more."

She shuddered and stopped speaking, as if she could not give utterance to her fears. It was not the first time I had seen her seized with a kind of terror when the words future and happiness were mentioned before her. One would have said she thought there was no

happiness in reserve for her, unless at the price of that she already possessed, and this thought came over her like a vision of terror.

Poor Stella! Alas! how insecure the joys of earth! To be deprived of them, or tremble lest we may be—that is to say, to possess these joys with a poignant fear that empoisons every instant of their duration, and increases more and more in proportion to their prolongation! . . .

Is it, then, really necessary for a supernatural light to open our eyes to force us to acknowledge that this world is only a place of promise, of which the realization is in another?

XXXIX.

THE following day Lando, at an unusually early hour, entered the little sitting-room next my chamber where I commonly remained in the morning. He looked so much graver than usual that I thought he had come to tell me there was some obstacle in the way of his matrimonial prospects. But it was once more of my affairs, and not of his, he wished to speak.

"Dear cousin," said he without any preamble, "I come at this unusual hour because I wish to see you alone. I have something important to tell you."

"Something that concerns you, Lando?"

"No, it concerns you and Lorenzo."

My heart gave a leap. What was he about to tell me? What new hope was to be dashed to the ground?

"Great goodness!" said I, giving immediate utterance to the only object of my mortal terror, "have you come to tell me Donna Faustina is at Naples, and Lorenzo has left me again?"

"Donna Faustina? Oh! no. Would to heaven it were merely a question of her, and that you had nothing more serious to apprehend on Lorenzo's part than another foolish journey, were she to lead him beyond the Black Sea! No, it is not a question of your husband's heart, which preoccupies you more than he deserves, but of his property and yours."

I breathed once more as I heard

these words, and my relief was so visible that Lando was out of patience.

"How singular and unpractical women are!" exclaimed he. "Here you are apparently grown calm because I have reassured you on a point less important in reality than the affair in question."

"I ought to be the judge of that, ought I not, Lando?" said I gravely.

"Of course. I will not discuss their merits with you. But remember, my dear cousin, if I am correctly informed, it is a question of losing all you possess! Lorenzo has been playing to a frightful degree! He made such good resolutions before me, as he was leaving Paris, that he does me the honor of concealing himself as much from me as from you. He had gone quite far enough before he went to Milan; but, since his return—influenced, I suppose, by a mad wish of diverting his mind from other things, and perhaps of repairing the breaches that had begun to alarm even him—he has added stock-gambling to the rest. Some one heard him say the other day that he expected to triple his fortune, or lose all he possessed. One of the two was indeed to happen. My dear cousin! . . . he has not tripled it, and the other alternative is seriously to be feared."

I listened with attention, but likewise with a calmness that was not merely exterior.

"You do not seem to understand," said he with more impatience than before, "that you are in danger of

losing everything you have? Yes, *everything!* . . . What would you say, for example," continued he, looking around, "if you were to see all the magnificence that now surrounds you, and to which you are accustomed, disappear; if this house and all the precious objects it contains were to vanish for ever from your sight?"

"I should say . . . But it is of little consequence what I should say or think in such a case. For the moment nothing is lost, and, when our lawsuit in Sicily is once gained, all fear of ruin will be chimerical. Allow me, therefore, to decline meanwhile participating in your fears."

"Yes, I know you are certain of gaining your cause, as it is in your father's hands. But if some radical change does not take place in Lorenzo's habits, the immense fortune that awaits him will share the fate of that he has just squandered."

"Therefore, Lando, as soon as the lawsuit is decided, I have formed the plan of inducing him to undertake one of those long journeys to some distant land, such as he has made so many of, and to take me with him. We shall soon come to a region where cards are unknown, and where he will never hear of dice, roulette, or of stocks."

"Nor of Donna Faustina, either, eh, cousin?" said he, laughing. "But you are not in earnest about banishing yourself in this way for an indefinite period, leaving the civilized world, and sharing the life he leads in these interminable journeys?"

"I shall not hesitate a single instant, I assure you," replied I warmly. "I shall esteem myself the happiest woman in the world if I can induce him to accede to my wish."

"Then," replied he with emo-

tion, "you can really save him; for he now needs a powerful distraction, a complete and radical change, that will really give a new turn to his whole life. Nothing less than this can save him. But you are admirable, Cousin Ginevra, it must be confessed."

"Wherein, Lando, I beg? In the course of a year you will consider my conduct very natural, and I hope Teresina will be of the same opinion."

"Perhaps so. But I assure you I intend to take a very different course from Lorenzo. I have done many foolish things, heaven knows; but there is a limit to everything, and I hope never to follow his example."

"Enough, Lando; you hurt my feelings and distress me."

He stopped, and soon after went away, leaving me preoccupied with what he had told me, though I was not troubled. Oh! what life, what repose, I found in the secret love that had been made manifest to me! The excitement of my first moment of transport had died away, but I had not become indifferent. I clearly saw the gathering clouds. I felt I was surrounded by dangers of all kinds; but I had nothing of the vague fear often produced by anxiety with respect to the future. What could happen to me? What tempests, what dangers, had I to fear with the clear, unmistakable assurance of an unfailing support, constant assistance, and a love ever faithful and vigilant, and more tender than any human affection—a love that is *infinite*,

which no earthly love can be? We sleep in peace on the stormiest sea when we are sure of the hand that guides us. How much more when we know that hand controls the waves them-

selves, and can still them at its will!

This conversation with Lando only served to increase my desire to leave Naples, and it was with real joy I saw the day of our departure arrive at last. I was joyfully making my preparations at an early hour in my room, which Lorenzo very seldom entered now, when he suddenly made his appearance. Of course I was doubly moved. But as soon as I glanced at his pale, agitated face, I knew he had come to impart some terrible news. But I only thought of what Lando had communicated, and exclaimed :

" Speak without any fear, Lorenzo. I have courage enough to hear it all."

But when he replied, it was my turn to grow pale ; I uttered a cry of anguish, and fell at his feet, overcome with horror and grief.

My father was no more ! At the very hour when he was arranging the final documents for his cause, on the very spot where he so long kept me at his side, he had fallen dead. No one was with him. At the sound of his fall the old servant, who always remained in the next room, hurried to his assistance, but in vain. Nothing could recall him to life !

This blow was terrible—terrible in itself and in its effect on, my hopes. In the first place, it put an immediate stop to all my new plans. Lorenzo felt it more necessary than ever to go to Sicily, but now absolutely refused to take me with him. He did not seem to understand how I could desire to go. In his eyes, the sole motive for such a journey no longer existed. I should now only expose myself to the most harrowing grief, which it was his duty to spare me. I did not dare

insist on going, for fear of irritating him at a moment when the very pity I inspired might increase the dawn of returning affection I thought I discovered. Besides, I had but little time for reflection. Only a few hours intervened between the arrival of this fatal news and Lorenzo's departure, which left me alone, abandoned to my grief and the bitterness of a disappointment I had not anticipated in the least, mingled with the remembrance of Lorenzo's inexplicable farewell !

It was evident he attributed my tears solely to filial emotion. I had seen him go away so many times without shedding any, that he had no reason to suppose his departure this time caused them to flow almost as much as the calamity that had befallen me. He even seemed surprised that I should insist on accompanying him to the boat and remaining with him till the last minute.

He had no idea how I longed to be permitted to forgive him on my knees ; how I wished to implore permission to aid him in breaking the fearful bonds that fettered his noble faculties ; to tear off, so to speak, the mask that seemed to change the very expression of his face ! Oh ! how I longed to save him. How I longed to bring this soul, so closely linked with mine, to itself ! The strong desire I once felt, that had been extinguished by jealousy, frivolity, and temptation, now sprang up again with a new force that was never to be destroyed. I was ready for any sacrifice in order to have it realized—yes, even for that of knowing my sacrifice for ever ignored ! Not that I did not aspire to win his heart once more ! It belonged to me by the same divine right that had given mine to him. I wished to

claim it, and I felt that this desire, however ardent it might be, by no means diminished the divine flame within that now kindled all my desires—those of earth as well as those of heaven !

He did not, alas ! have any suspicion of all this. And yet, when I raised my eyes in bidding him farewell, he perhaps saw the look of affection and sorrowful regret I was unable to repress ; for he looked at me an instant with an expression which made me suddenly thrill with hope ! One would have almost said an electric spark enabled our souls to comprehend each other without the aid of words. But this moment was as fleeting as that spark —more transitory than the quickest flash that leaves the night as dark as before !

His face became graver than ever; his brow more gloomy and anxious, as if some terrible thought had been awakened. He continued to gaze at me, as he put up the little straw hat I wore, and, pushing back my hair with the caressing air of protection once so familiar, he kissed my forehead and cheek, and, pressing me a moment against his heart, he uttered these strange words : “ Whatever happens, I wish you to be happy, Ginevra. Promise me you will! . . . ”

I had been at home a long time, and seen the last trace of smoke from the steamboat disappear between Capri and the coast beyond Sorrento, without having resolution enough to leave that side of the terrace which commanded the most distant view of the sea. I remained with my eyes fastened on the horizon, looking at the waves, agitated by the mournful sirocco, whose dull, sad moans afar off add so much to the gloom felt at Naples when the bright sun and blue sky are ob-

scured. Elsewhere bad weather is nothing surprising, but at Naples it always astonishes and creates anxiety, as if it were abnormal, as the sudden gravity of a smiling face affects and alarms us more than that of one naturally austere.

I remained, therefore, in my seat, dwelling on my recent hopes, my sudden disappointment and its distressing cause, on Lorenzo’s departure without me, his look, his mysterious words, and his affectionate manner as he bade me farewell.

Oh ! why, at whatever cost, had I not gone with him ? And then I followed him in thought to the dear place I was never to behold again —to the old palace at Messina where I had passed my childhood, happy and idolized, under the eye of her who always seemed to me like some heavenly vision. Beside her I saw my father—“ my beloved father.” I uttered these last words aloud, looking, with eyes full of tears, towards the wild gloomy sea that separated me from him in death as it had in life.

At that instant I heard Lando’s voice beside me. He had approached without my hearing him. He had a kind heart that redeemed many of his faults, and had come to pity and console me in his way.

“ My poor cousin ! I am overwhelmed. . . . What a frightful, irreparable misfortune ! I feel as if it concerned me almost as much as you.”

After a moment’s pause he continued :

“ And what is to be done now ? In three days that great trial is to take place and your cause is to be decided ! What advocate, good heavens ! can be found that can, I will not say equal, but replace, the able and illustrious Fabrizio dei Monti ? ”

XL.

The first days of mourning, anxiety, and expectation were spent almost entirely alone. I only left the house to go to the convent, and saw no one at home but Stella and my aunt, who, though she resembled her brother but little, loved him tenderly, and was inconsolable at his loss.

A week passed by, and I began to be surprised at not having received any news from Lorenzo. The lawsuit must be over. It was time for him to return, or, at least, for me to receive a letter from him. But none had come, and I remained in this state of suspense a length of time that was inexplicable. At last I received two lines written in haste, not from him, but from my brother:

"I shall arrive the day after this note, and will then tell you everything. Do not lose courage."

"MARIO."

Lando was present when this note arrived, and I read it aloud.

"O heavens!" he exclaimed, "you have lost your cause! That is evident. He tells you so plainly enough! . . . And I cannot see what he can have worse to tell you."

He kept on talking for some time, but I did not listen to him. I read the note over and over again. Why had not Lorenzo written? Why was Mario coming, and why did he not say Lorenzo was to accompany him? Why did he not even mention his name? . . . I did not dare acknowledge to myself the terrible fear that passed through my mind; but I recalled his mysterious words, his look, his voice, and his whole manner when he bade me farewell, and everything assumed an ominous look. A possibility flashed across my

mind which I did not dare dwell on for fear of losing my reason, and, with it, the blessed remembrance that was the only support of my life! I suffered that night as I had not suffered since the hours of grief and remorse that followed the death of my mother!

The next day, at a late hour, I at last perceived the boat from Sicily slowly coming up the bay, struggling against a violent outwind; for, after a long continuation of fine weather, now came a succession of dismal, stormy days, such as often cast a gloom over the end of spring at Naples. My first impulse was to go to meet Mario at the landing; but I changed my mind, and concluded to remain at home, that I might be alone when I should receive the news he was bringing me.

I found it difficult, however, to control my impatience, for I had to wait nearly an hour longer. But at last I heard his step on the stairs; then my door opened, and he made his appearance. What I experienced when I saw he was really alone showed to what an extent I had flattered myself Lorenzo would return with him. I gazed at him without stirring from my seat, without the strength to ask a single question. He came to me, took me in his arms with more tenderness than he had ever shown in his life, and when he kissed me I saw his eyes were filled with tears.

"Lorenzo! Where is Lorenzo?" I exclaimed as soon as I could speak.

"Be calm, sister," said he—"be calm, I beg of you. . . . I will tell you the whole truth without the slightest evasion."

"But before anything else, tell me where Lorenzo is, and why he did not come with you."

"Ginevra, I cannot tell you, for I do not know yet. I am quite as ignorant as you what has become of him."

At this reply the beating of my heart became so violent that I thought I should faint away; but I struggled to overcome the anguish that seized me, and said in a hoarse voice :

"At least, tell me all you know, Mario, without delay or reticence."

Mario drew from his pocket a letter carefully sealed, but still seemed to hesitate about giving it to me. But I recognized the writing, and cut short all explanation by snatching it from his hands, and ran to a seat in the most retired corner of the room, where I could read it at my ease, and my brother could not guess its contents by my face till it should suit me to communicate them.

"Ginevra, you will doubtless have learned, before opening this letter, that I have lost my cause—in other words, that I am ruined, irrevocably ruined. I had a presentiment of this when the only one who could bring it to a favorable issue was taken away by death at the critical moment; and when I embraced you at my departure, I felt convinced I was bidding you adieu for ever. . . . Whatever I may be, this word will no doubt startle you. Though the loss of a very bad husband is by no means irreparable, you will shudder, I am sure, at the thought of all so desperate a state of affairs may render me capable of, and the most fearful of extremities has already crossed your mind, I have no doubt. Well, you are not wrong. I confess it was my in-

tention, and you may be glad to know it was *you* who caused me to change it. Yes, Ginevra, the thought of you occurred to my mind, and I was unwilling to add another horrible remembrance to those I had already left you, and render a catastrophe, already sufficiently terrible, still more tragical. It would, however, have restored you to liberty, and permitted your young life to resume its course and find a happiness I can no longer promise you. This thought furnished an additional reason to all those suggested by despair; but the sweet, suppliant look you gave me, the inexplicable, celestial expression you wore when we separated, arrested me. The remembrance of that look still haunts me. What did you wish to say to me, Ginevra? What had you to ask me? What could be the prayer that seemed to hover on your lips! I can repair nothing now. The past is no longer in my power, and the future is blighted. The captivating charm of your beauty has not been powerful enough to enable me to overcome myself. It is now too late, as you see yourself. All is over. My faults have led to the most fatal consequences. I have only to endure them, whatever they may be. I resign myself to the struggle, then. The very word stimulates me, for to struggle is to labor, and work I love to excess! Why did I not give my whole soul up to it instead of other things! Ah! if the past could only be restored! . . . But let us return to the present. I will work, then; yes, work, Ginevra, *to gain my livelihood*. However great a sybarite I have appeared, and am, I am equal to it. I can and will labor, but far from you—separated from you. Thanks to your brother's generosity and the means still at my disposal,

which will be communicated to you, this great reverse will entail no privation on you. This is my only hope, my only comfort; for, after having clouded the fairest portion of your life, to invite you to participate in the bitterness of my misfortunes would make me despise myself and fill me with despair. Be happy, therefore, if you do not wish me to put an end to my life. And now *adieu*. This word is used for a brief absence, for the separation of a day. What will be the length of ours? . . . A lifelong one, apparently. . . . May my life be short, that I may not long deprive you of your freedom!

"Ginevra, you are young, you are beautiful. You are calculated to love and please, and, however unfaithful and inconstant I have been, I am jealous! But I leave you without fear, under the protection of that something mysterious and incomprehensible within you that is a safeguard to your youth and beauty! I have forfeited the right to love and protect you, but I know and venerate you as a holy, angelic being. Ginevra, I ought to say, I wish I could say, forgive me; but that word is vain when it is a question of the irreparable. I shall do better, then, to say—forget me!"

LORENZO."

While I was reading this letter with eager interest, Mario remained in the place where I left him, his face buried in his hands, absorbed in sad reflections. I approached him. He instantly looked up.

"Well, sister," said he anxiously, "have you any idea from this letter where Lorenzo has gone?"

"No."

"No? . . . And yet you look calm and relieved. What other

good news could there be in the letter?"

What good news! . . . I was really embarrassed to know what reply to make to his question. I was relieved, to be sure. My heart beat with a certain joy, but it would not do to say so; nor could I have made Mario comprehend the reason, for nothing, in fact, could be more serious than my position.

"No good news," I replied. "His letter contains nothing cheering, assuredly, for it announces the loss of his lawsuit, which your note had prepared me for. And Lorenzo seems to bid me an eternal farewell, as if he imagined I should allow him to separate my life entirely from his! That remains to be decided. But in order to know what I ought to do, you must tell me everything that has happened, Mario, without any restriction."

Mario had hoped to be able to avoid telling me the whole truth, but at this appeal made no further attempt at concealment, and was grateful to me for the courage which lightened so painful a duty.

Lorenzo arrived at Messina, persuaded in advance that my father's death was the signal of his ruin. But when the cause was decided against him, he remained apparently very calm. During the evening he had a long conversation with Mario, in which he occupied himself in making arrangements that would secure my comfort, placing at my disposal all he had left, and accepting the generous offer of my brother, who now refused to profit by the renunciation of my right to a portion of my father's property which I had made at the time of my marriage. Lorenzo, during this conversation, repeatedly expressed the desire this storm might

pass over my head without affecting me.

The following morning Mario received a package containing the substance of this conversation, regularly signed and sealed, and a sealed letter addressed to me, without any other explanation. My brother waited till the hour appointed by Lorenzo the night before for a meeting, but he did not make his appearance; and when Mario went in search of him, he learned he had taken his departure in the night without leaving any trace of the direction he had taken. Two boats had left Messina during the night, one for the Levant, and the other for America. But, notwithstanding all the precautions taken by Lorenzo to prevent any one from knowing which way he had gone, Mario thought he had embarked on the latter of these two boats.

Lorenzo had ordered the steward that had always been in his employ to aid my brother in the execution of his wishes and whatever was to be done in consequence, either in Sicily or Naples. But he had not revealed to him, any more than to me or my brother, his personal affairs, or the place to which he was going.

After listening to this account with the utmost attention, I requested Mario to leave me alone a few hours, that I might reflect on all I had heard, and consider at my leisure what course I ought to pursue. I felt indeed the need of collecting my thoughts in solitude and silence; but above all . . . oh!

above all! I longed to be alone, that I might fall on my knees and bless God!

Yes, bless him with transport! The fear, the horrible, intolerable fear, that had taken hold of my mind, was for ever removed by the contents of Lorenzo's letter. Regret, if not repentance, for his faults was betrayed in every line he wrote. The manly energy of his character, too, was manifest throughout. As to what related to me, I felt touched, and more proud of the tender, confiding, respectful interest he expressed, than of all the passionate fervor of his former language. And I blessed heaven for not being unworthy of it. Finally, finally, the words, "I will work to gain my livelihood," made my heart leap with joy; for I saw it put an end to the dangerous, indolent, pernicious life of the past, and held out a hope of regeneration and salvation—a salvation physical, moral, present, future, eternal! It really seemed impossible to feel such a hope could be paid for too dearly!

I remembered, however, that I should have to discuss my affairs with Mario, and perhaps with Lando also, whose heart was extremely moved by this catastrophe; and I endeavored, before meeting them again, to moderate a joy that would have appeared inexplicable, and, at the very time when I was more reasonable than I had ever been in my life, would have rendered me in their estimation extravagant in my notions, and without any practical sense as to the things of the world.

XLI.

When I saw Mario again, therefore, I thanked him affectionately for his generosity, but declared I

would not accept the restoration of the inheritance I had renounced at the time of my marriage with the

Duca di Valenzano. Livia had done the same on entering the convent. Mario was, and should remain, my father's only heir. I was determined not to allow any change in this arrangement. I had great difficulty in overcoming his resistance; and when I could not help remarking that the sacrifices which awaited me would cost me but little, he stopped me by saying I had not yet made the trial, and insisted I should take no immediate resolution with regard to the matter.

"Very well," said I, "if it is your wish, we will discuss the point at a later day. Let us confine our attention for the moment to what is of much more importance. You know very well we cannot long remain ignorant where Lorenzo is, and as soon as we know I shall go to him."

"Go to him?"

"Do you doubt it?"

Mario looked at me with surprise, and was silent for an instant. Then he said :

"Sister, Lorenzo's conduct has been so notorious that, notwithstanding the solicitude I acknowledge he manifested for you at our last interview, no one would be astonished at your remaining among your friends and availing yourself of the means he has used to deliver you from the consequences of his folly."

"Accept this beautiful villa, which he wishes to except from the sale of his property? . . . Surround myself with the comforts you have together provided me with, and leave him—him!—alone, poor, struggling against the difficulties of beginning a new life? . . . Really, Mario, if you believe I would consent to this, it is a proof that, though you are less severe than you once were to your poor little sister, you are not altogether just to her."

Mario took my hand, and kissed it with emotion.

"Pardon me, Ginevra; I confess I did not think you were so generous or so courageous!"

Courageous! . . . I was not so much so as he thought. A hope had risen in my heart which would have rendered poverty itself easy to endure, and even in such a case I should not have been an object of pity. But here there was no question of poverty. My sight was clearer than that of Mario or Lando, and I was, in fact, more sensible than either of my two advisers. It was only a question, at most, of a temporary embarrassment. Lorenzo's land, the valuable objects accumulated in his different houses, and the sale of all my diamonds, would suffice, and more than suffice, to fill the pit dug by his extravagance, however deep it might be. Besides, his talents alone, as soon as he chose to turn them to account, excluded all fear of actual poverty. The mere name of *Lorenzo* with which he signed all his productions had long been familiar to the art-world, and consequently he would not be obliged to strive for a position.

It was merely a question, therefore, of the relinquishment of all this display, this magnificence, this overwhelming profusion of superfluities, and all the luxuries of life that now surrounded me. Ah! I did not dare tell them what I thought of such *sacrifices*! I did not dare speak of my indifference, which greatly facilitated their task, however, and still less did I dare reveal the cause, for fear of being accused of madness, and that at a time when they should have considered it a proof of the beneficial effects of supernatural influences on ordinary life. I contented my-

self, therefore, with merely explaining the reason why my situation seemed to me by no means desperate. They were relieved to see me take things in such a way, and from that moment the necessary changes, so painful, in their estimation, were undertaken without any delay, though without haste, without fear, without concealment, and all the so-called great sacrifices began to be accomplished.

It would be difficult to render an account of all I experienced during the following days and weeks. All I can say is that I felt as if my shackles and barriers one by one were removed, and at every step I breathed a purer air! . . . Does this mean I had become a saint, aspiring to heroic sacrifices and utter renunciation? Assuredly not. I repeat it, I could have no illusion of this kind. I clearly comprehended that this catastrophe, which seemed so terrible to others, which Lorenzo considered beyond my strength to bear, and would have thrown him into an excess of despair, only tore off the brilliant exterior of my life. But I had often experienced a confused, persistent desire at various times and places to be freed from this outer husk, and I now began to understand a thousand things that heretofore had been inexplicable in the bottom of my soul.

The magnificence that surrounded me belonged, however, to my station, and all this display was not without reason or excuse; but I felt it impeded my course, and, as a pious, profound soul* has said of happiness itself, in striving to attain the true end, it only served to *lengthen the way!*

There was, then, neither courage

nor resignation in this case. I was reasonable and satisfied, as every human being is who in an exchange feels he has gained a thousand times more than he has lost! The only anxiety I now felt was to discover the place to which Lorenzo had betaken himself. I did not in the least believe he had gone either to the Levant or America, but every means seemed to have been used by him to defeat our efforts to discover him. One of the two boats that left Messina the night of his departure was to touch at Marseilles on the way. Reflection and instinct both assured me he had proceeded no further, but from that place had gone where he could most easily resume his labors and begin his new life. In this respect Rome or Paris would have equally suited him, but it seemed improbable he had returned to Italy. It was therefore to Paris I directed my search, and I wrote Mme. de Kergy to aid me in finding him.

Perhaps I should have hesitated had Gilbert been at home; but he was absent, absent for a year, and before his return I should have time to reflect on the course I ought to pursue, perhaps ask the advice of his mother herself, to whom, meanwhile, I made known my present situation, my wishes, my projects, and the extreme anxiety to which I hoped with her assistance to put an end.

It was not long before I received a reply, and it was much more favorable than I had ventured to hope. Her large, affectionate heart seemed not only to comprehend fully what I had merely given her an outline of, but to have penetrated to the bottom of mine, and divined even what I had not attempted to say. I felt I had in her a

* Eugénie de la Ferronays.

powerful support. Her inquiries were promptly and successfully made, and the result was what I had foreseen. Lorenzo was really in Paris, in an obscure corner of the Faubourg Saint-Germain. He had narrow quarters adjoining a large studio, where he had already begun to work. "His celebrity is too great for him to remain long concealed," wrote Mme. de Kergy; "besides, the very thing he is aiming at would prevent all possibility of his remaining long incognito. Several of his friends have already found him out and called to see him, but he has only consented to receive one of them, whose counsels and assistance are indispensable. This gentleman is also a friend of ours. I have learned through him that as soon as your husband gets under way in his work, he intends to enter into communication with those he has left, and probably with you, my dear Ginevra; but he persists in his intention of remaining by himself, and not allowing you to share his lot. He thinks he has arranged everything so you can continue to live very nearly the same as before, with the exception of his presence, which, he says, he has done nothing to make you desire. You will have some difficulty in overcoming his obstinacy in this re-

spect; you will find it hard to induce one who is so sensible of his wrongs towards you to accept the heavy burden of gratitude. All the sacrifices he imposes on himself will cost him far less than to consent to those you are so ready to make for him. Men are all so Be patient, therefore; be prudent, and have sufficient thoughtfulness, and feeling to manifest your generosity in such a way that he will perceive it as little as possible. . . ."

It was the easier to follow Mme. de Kergy's advice that the course she wished me to pursue would be strictly sincere. I wrote him, therefore, without affectation or restraint, what my heart dictated, but I wrote in vain; my first and second letters remained unanswered. The third drew forth a reply, but it contained a refusal of my wishes which betrayed all the motives indicated by my aged friend. Alas! to make others accept forgiveness is often a thousand times more difficult than to obtain it ourselves!

I was not discouraged, however. I made preparations for my departure, as if he had sent for me, and I awaited impatiently the time, without the least doubt as to its arrival, determined to find some means of hastening it, should the delay be too much prolonged.

XLII.

While so much apparent, as well as real, gloom was gathering around my path, there was no diminution in the interior brightness of my soul; which was only manifested, however, by an activity, and at the same time tranquillity, that greatly surprised my brother and all my friends, especially my aunt, whose agitation was extreme.

I will not say that Donna Clelia felt in the least that pleasure at the misfortunes of others attributed by a great satirist to all mankind, but the change in our respective situations which now afforded her an opportunity of pitying and protecting instead of envying me, was by no means displeasing to her pride or kindness of heart.

She offered me the most unlimited hospitality. She wished to establish me in her *palazzo* on the Toledo, and give up the largest of her spacious drawing-rooms to my sole use. She did not comprehend how I could remain in my house when it was being stripped of all the magnificence that had placed me, in her eyes, on the very pinnacle of happiness. But I refused to the last to leave my chamber and the terrace, with its incomparable view, the privation of which I should have felt more than anything else. I remained, therefore, in the corner (a very spacious one, however) of my beautiful home I had reserved for myself, encouraged by Stella, who, without surprise or wonder, comprehended my motives, and assisted me in making preparations for my departure. She always brought Angiolina with her, which added to our enjoyment; for she continually hovered around, enlivening us with her prattle. So, in spite of the sadness of my position, I was able, without much effort, to rise above my dejection and gloom.

Weeks passed away, however, and, though I had not renounced the hope of overcoming Lorenzo's obstinacy, I began to grow impatient, and was thinking of starting without his consent; for it seemed to me, when once near him, he could not refuse to see me. This uncertainty was the most painful feature of my present situation, and the rainy season, meanwhile, added its depressing influence to all the rest. But to disturb my peace of mind and diminish my courage would have required a trial more severe and painful than that.

The sky once more became clear, and we were at length able to return to the terrace, from which we had so long been banished by

the rain. The clumps of verdure in the garden, the perfume of the flowers, the blueness of the mountains, sea, and sky—in short, all nature seemed to atone by her unusual brilliancy for having been so long forced to veil her beautiful face. But Stella, instead of being charmed and transported, as usual, with the prospect, looked gravely and silently around for some time, then, with a sudden explosion of grief, threw herself on my neck.

"Ginevra, what will become of Angiolina and me when you are gone? . . . Ah! I ought to love nobody in the world but her!"

She sat down on one of the benches on the terrace, and took up the child, who had not left us an instant during the day, to play, as she usually did. And when Angiolina, with her eyes full of tears, begged her to prevent her dear Zia Gina from going away, all Stella's firmness gave way for an instant, and she burst into tears.

Oh! how strongly I then felt, in my turn, the difference there is between the sacrifice of exterior objects and the interior sacrifices that rend the soul! The infinite love that tempers all the sufferings of this world exempts no one from these trials. I might even say it increases them, for it enlarges the capacity of our affection and pity: it makes us fully realize what suffering is, and gives it its true meaning.

I could not, therefore, look at Stella in her present mood without being overcome by a sadness I had never felt before at the thought of our separation. Her tears, which she was generally so well able to suppress, continued to flow, as she rocked her child in silence. She remained thus without uttering a word, even in reply to my ques-

tions, until little Angiolina, after quietly weeping a long time, fell into a heavy, profound sleep in her mother's arms.

It was the first time I had ever known Stella to lose courage. Mine failed me at the sight, and this hour—the last we were to pass together on the terrace so full of pleasant associations, and so often trod by Angiolina's little feet—this hour was sad beyond all expression, and in appearance beyond all reason. The serenity of the soul, like the sky of Italy, is thus obscured at times by clouds that trouble and afflict the more because the light they veil is habitually so bright and serene! Neither Stella nor I, however, were disposed to believe in presentiments. Besides, our sadness was too well founded to be surprising. Nevertheless, something darker hovered over us than we foresaw at the moment: the morrow already threw its gloom over this last evening!

The sun was going down. Stella suddenly started from her reverie and awoke Angiolina. It was time to take her home. But the child's eyes, generally so bright, were now heavy. She hardly opened them when I approached to embrace her. Her little mouth made a slight movement to return my kiss, and she fell asleep again immediately. Her mother, surprised, and somewhat alarmed at her unwonted languor, hastily wrapped a shawl around her to protect her as much as possible from the evening air, and carried her away.

The following day, of sorrowful memory, rose bright and radiant for me; for when I awoke, I found a letter from Lorenzo awaiting me—a letter which put an end to all my perplexities, and justified, beyond

all my hopes, the confidence with which I had expected it.

"Ginevra, you have prevailed. I venture at last to beg your forgiveness, for your letters have inspired the hope of some day merit ing it. I no longer fear, therefore, to meet you again. Come! It is my wish. I am waiting for you.

"LORENZO."

These last lines contained the surest promise of happiness I had ever received in my life, and I kissed them with tears. I longed to start that very hour, and it will not seem surprising now that I looked around the sumptuous dwelling I was about to leave for ever without regret, and even at the enchanting prospect my eyes were never weary of gazing at! It was by no means these exterior objects that inspired the deep, unalterable joy of my soul. I did not owe to them the vision of happiness I thought I now caught the first ray of. My only regret, therefore, was that I could not start as soon as I wished. All my preparations were made, and I longed to take my departure at once. But I had to wait three days before the first boat on which I could embark would leave for Marseilles—a delay that seemed so long! Alas! I was far from fore seeing how painful and short I should find them!

Stella had passed every day with me for the last few weeks, and I now awaited her arrival to communicate my joy. But the usual hour for her to come had gone by. She did not appear. I was surprised at this delay, and, instead of waiting any longer, I proceeded on foot to her house, which was only at a short distance from mine. The previous evening had left me no anxiety, and its sadness had been dispersed with the joy of the morning.

When I arrived, I found the door open. No servant was there to announce me. I went through the gallery, a large drawing-room, and a cabinet, without meeting a person. At length I came to Stella's chamber, where Angiolina also slept in a little bed beside her mother's. I entered. . . . Oh! how shall I describe the sight that met my eyes! How express all my feelings of amazement, pity, affection, and grief!

My dear, unhappy Stella was seated in the middle of the room with her child extended on her knees, pale, motionless, and apparently without life!

She did not shed a tear; she did not utter a word. She raised an instant her large eyes, which were unusually dilated, and looked at me. What a look! O God! it expressed the grief that mothers alone can feel, and which no other on earth can surpass! . . . I fell on my knees beside her. Angiolina still breathed, but she was dying. She opened her beautiful eyes a moment. . . . A look of recognition crossed them. . . . They turned from her mother to me, and from me to her mother, and then grew dim. A convulsive shudder ran over her, and it was all over. The angel was in heaven. The mother was bereft, for this life, of her only child! . . .

The longest years cannot efface the memory of such an hour, and time, which at last subdues all grief, never gave me the courage to dwell on this. Mothers who have been pierced by such a sword cannot speak of it; others dare not. The woman who has no child, in the presence of one who has just lost hers, can only bend in silence and respect before the sovereign majesty of grief!

I will merely state, with respect to what preceded, that the drowsiness of the child the night before was a symptom of the violent malady which suddenly attacked her in the middle of the night. After abating towards day, it came on again an hour later, and kept increasing without any relaxation to the end.

As for me, who had given Angiolina the place that had remained vacant in my heart, the excess of my grief enabled me to form an estimate of hers whose heart was filled with far greater anguish at being so suddenly robbed of her all by death. I shuddered at the thought of a sorrow greater than mine, and did not dare dwell on my own troubles in the presence of a grief that cast into the shade all the sufferings I had ever witnessed before. What a remedy for the imaginary or exaggerated woes of life it is to suddenly be brought to witness the reality of the most terrible of misfortunes!

What a price was I now to pay for the journey I had so long looked forward to—the reunion I had longed for with so many prayers and obtained by so many efforts!

To leave Stella in her affliction was a trial I had not anticipated, and one which the most imperious duty alone could have induced me to consent to. I had to do it, however, but not till I had succeeded in gratifying the only remaining wish of her broken heart—"to leave the world for a few months, that she might be alone, free to abandon herself entirely to the dear, angelic memory of her lost joy. . . ."

Stella uttered no complaint. Her grief was mute. But she had expressed this desire, and it was granted. Livia obtained a place of retreat for her in a part of her convent that

was not cloistered. It was there I left her, in the shadow of that sweet sanctuary, near the tenderest, strongest heart she could have to lean on, in presence of the magnificent prospect before her, and be-

neath the brilliant canopy of that glorious sky, beyond which she could follow in spirit the treasure she had been deprived of, but which she felt sure of some day finding again !

XLIII.

I was filled with solemn emotion when, having taken leave of my brother and all the friends who had accompanied me on board, I at length found myself alone with Ottavia on the deck of the boat, gazing at the receding mountains, hills, villas, and the smiling, flowery shores of the Bay of Naples as they vanished away. Two years had scarcely flown since the day when this prospect met my eyes for the first time. But during this short period so many different feelings had agitated my heart, and so many events had crossed my path, that the time seemed as long as a whole life.

Joys and sorrows, ardent hopes and bitter deceptions, severe trials, dangerous temptations, a deadly struggle, grace—to crown all! grace luminous and wonderful—had all succeeded each other in my soul. And to all these remembrances was now added the new sorrow which set on these last days a mournful, heartrending seal ! The death of a child, it is true, would seem to the indifferent to seriously wound no heart but its mother's. Mine, however, bled profusely, and the sudden death of the angelic little creature I had so much loved, as well as the separation that so soon took place, cast an inexpressible gloom over the hour of departure I had so eagerly longed for, and which I had obtained at the price of sacrifices which till now had not seemed worthy of being

counted. Truly, the words already quoted do not apply less to earthly affections than to the divine love that overrules them and includes them all : "There is no living in love without some pain or sorrow." This is indubitable. The more tender the affection, the more exquisite the suffering it entails. But by way of recompense, in proportion as these cruel wounds are multiplied, the never-failing supreme love affords a remedy by revealing itself more and more fully, and thereby supplying the place of all these vanished joys. This love alone assures the promise, the pledge, of their restoration and immortal duration !

Therefore, whatever the sadness of this hour ; whatever the desolation of heart with which I gazed at the convent on yonder height where I had just parted from Stella and my sister with so many tears—in short, whatever the emotions of all kinds that seemed combined to overwhelm me, I felt, in spite of them, I lived a truer, freer life than when for the first time, surrounded with illusions and deceitful hopes, I crossed this bay in all the intoxication of radiant happiness !

These thoughts, and many others of a similar nature, passed through my mind while the boat was rapidly cleaving the waves, and little by little the last outline of the coast of Italy faded away and finally disappeared from my eyes for ever.

Night came on, the stars appeared, but I remained in the place where I was, without being able to make up my mind to leave it.

This solitude of the sea—more profound than any other—speaks to the soul a language peculiar to itself. I listened to it with undivided attention, blessing God for having inclined me to hear his voice, to give heed to no other during the period of inaction and repose which separated the portion of my life just closed from that which was about to commence under new and unknown circumstances.

I did not stop at Marseilles, for I was impatient to arrive at my journey's end. And yet, in spite of the summons I was now obeying, I was not without anxiety as to the reception I should meet with. I knew the mobility of Lorenzo's feelings, and that the letter I had so recently received from him was not a sure guarantee of the disposition in which I should find him. In fact, when I met him on my arrival at the station, I did not at first know what to think. He was pale, agitated, and gloomy, and could scarcely hide the suffering his face expressed much more clearly than joy at seeing me again. I felt the arm tremble on which I was leaning, and I remained silent, confounded, and anxious. He hurried me through the crowd, placed me in a carriage, made Ottavia take a seat beside me, then closed the door with an air of constraint, saying he wished to arrive before me.

At first I was astonished at finding myself so suddenly separated from him, after barely seeing him for a moment. But I saw, by the embarrassment and painful agitation he manifested, what was passing in his mind, and was extremely affected. Poor Lorenzo! it was

not in this way he had once led his young bride beneath his roof. This was not the future he then took pleasure in depicting, or what he had promised. The immense change of fortune he had undergone was now for the first time to be realized by the wife he had outraged, and from whom he did not dare expect an affection which would overlook all and render every sacrifice light. I felt he regretted now that he had consented to my coming.

After a long drive we at last came to the end of a street at the extremity of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, where we entered a small court, and the carriage stopped before a door of very unpretending appearance.

But the house to which it gave access, covered on the outside with climbing plants that concealed the reddish tint of the walls, had a picturesque appearance seldom found in any house in Paris, large or small. Lorenzo, with his artistic eye, had discovered it, and understood also how it should be arranged interiorly. Consequently, when he ushered me into a *salon* opening into a little parterre filled with flowers, beyond which rose the trees of an adjacent garden, which made it seem like some rural solitude; when he took me all over the ground-floor, where everything was simple, but nothing vulgar; when on all sides I found evidences both of his taste and his solicitude for me; above all, when I saw in his cabinet and studio all the indications that he had resumed his habits of assiduous labor and serious study, so great a joy filled my heart and beamed from my eyes that he could no longer feel any doubt, and I saw the cloud that veiled his brow totally disappear.

"Is it possible? . . . Is it true?" said he. "You are satisfied, Ginevra? And I can welcome your presence without remorse?"

I was affected to tears.

"I assure you," said I, with a sincerity of accent that could not be mistaken, "this so-called great catastrophe has only taken away the things I did not care for: it gives me here all I love, and nearly everything I desire."

I looked at him hesitatingly, not yet knowing how far to go. But his look inspired me with courage, and I continued, with emotion:

"Tell me, in your turn, that you regret nothing, that my presence suffices, and I pledge you my word, Lorenzo, this hour will be the happiest of my life."

Instead of replying directly, he knelt down beside the little divan where I was sitting, and I saw his eyes beaming with the expression that once used to flash from them for an instant, not uncertain and transitory as then, but calm, stable, and profound.

"Ginevra," said he, "in assuring you to-day that my reason has been restored to me, that I have for ever recovered from my detestable aberration, that I again look upon you as I did when you first effaced every other image, that I love you as much, yes, a thousand times more than ever, this is not saying enough, this is not telling you what you would perhaps listen to far more gladly than all this."

I opened my eyes and looked steadily towards him. He felt my soul was trying to read his, and he continued in a low, agitated tone:

"You have made me love in you what is better than yourself. Listen to me. . . . Long years of indifference had effaced the memory of divine things I had been taught

in my childhood. Did you think they could ever be recalled? I had never felt the slightest desire. It is you, Ginevra, who caused their return. Can you realize it?"

O my God! this hour was too happy for earth! It left me only one wish more. It realized to the fullest extent all the cherished dreams of the past, and made me touch at last the summit (alas! always threatening and uncertain) of earthly happiness! No cloud has ever obscured the bright, blessed remembrance! No suffering, no trial, has ever checked the effusion of gratitude I still feel, and which will be eternal!

It will not be difficult to understand that, in this new state of things, our life speedily and sweetly resumed its course. Strange to say, this calm, simple life, exempt from splendor, luxury, and worldly *éclat*, was the precise realization of the secret desire I had always cherished in my soul, the signification of which had been revealed to me in that great day of grace which I may call that of my *true birth*!

It would, therefore, have been an absurdity to speak of sacrifice in the situation in which I now found myself. But Lorenzo did not yet see things in the same light.

"I acknowledge," said he one day, after some weeks had passed by—"I acknowledge we lack nothing essential, that the waifs from our wreck even afford us a comfortable support, but I wish more than that for you, my Ginevra. I must work for the means of restoring all my folly has deprived you of. The public receives my productions with marked favor. They have all been sold at a fabulous price, except one which I will never part with. Let me alone, therefore, and I promise you the day shall arrive when I

will place on your brow a diadem even more brilliant than the one you have lost."

I made a quick gesture, and was about to express the repugnance such a prospect inspired. But I stopped. It was better, no matter in what way, he should be stimulated by some object to be attained by the laborious efforts to which he devoted all his faculties. I allowed him, therefore, to dream of the jewels he would adorn me with, and enlarge on his plans for the future, while I was sitting beside him in his studio, sometimes reading to him, and sometimes becoming his model again. Whenever he spoke in this way, I smiled without trying to oppose him.

Mme. de Kergy and Diana hastened to see me the day after my arrival. We continued to meet almost daily, and I found in their delightful society the strongest support, the wisest counsels, and an affection which inspired almost unlimited confidence.

As to Gilbert, he was still absent, and not expected to return till the autumn of the following year.

When his mother gave me this information, my first feeling was one of relief. It seemed to me my relations with his family were simplified by his absence, and I could defer all thought as to what I should do at his return. But, when I saw my dear, venerable friend secretly wipe away a tear as she spoke of her son; when she added in a trembling voice that such a separation at her age was a severe trial which afflicted her more than any she had ever known; when Diana afterwards came to tell me with a full heart that Gilbert's absence was shortening her mother's days, oh! then my heart sank with

profound sorrow, and I felt an ardent, painful desire to repair the evil I had caused—an evil which (whatever may be said) is never altogether involuntary!

Ah! if women would only consider how far their fatal influence sometimes extends, even those who add hardness of heart to their desire to please would become indifferent to the wish. They scarcely hesitate sometimes to sacrifice a man's career, his abilities, his whole existence. Vanity and pride take pleasure in ravages of this kind. But if their eyes could behold the firesides they quench the light of, the maternal hearts they sadden, the families whose sweet joys they destroy, their trophies would seem bloody, and they might be brought to comprehend the words of the Psalmist which I had humbly learned to repeat: *Ab occultis meis munda me, et ab alienis parce seruo tuo.*

Lorenzo's celebrity increased by the productions he now exhibited to the public. The singularity of our position in returning to Paris, under circumstances so different from those which surrounded us when we made our first appearance in the *grand monde*, drew upon us the attention of this very world which would have enticed us from our retreat. But, thank Heaven! I did not have to exert my influence over Lorenzo to induce him to decline it. His pride would have been sufficient, had not his whole time been absorbed in his labors, and it was even with difficulty he consented to accompany me one evening to the Hôtel de Kergy.

From that time, however, he willingly repeated his visits, attracted by Mme. de Kergy's dignified cordiality and simplicity of manner as well as by the charm of the intellectual circle of which her *salon*

was the centre—a charm he would have always appreciated had he not been under the influence of another attraction. Now there was no counteracting influence, and he took fresh pleasure every evening in going there to repose after the fatigue of the day and seek something more beneficial to his mind than mere recreation.

A person endowed with noble gifts, who returns to the right path after long going astray, experiences an immense consolation in finding himself in his true element. It would, therefore, be impossible to tell how great Lorenzo's joy now was, or how eloquently he was able to express it. And nothing could express the feelings with which I listened to him!

The only shadow of my life at this time was my separation from Stella. A thousand times did I urge her to join me, as she was no longer under any obligation to remain at Naples. I felt that the only possible solace for her broken heart would be to leave the place where she had suffered so much; her courageous soul would find a salutary aliment in the great charitable movement at Paris, at that time in all the vigor of its first impulse, given a few years before. I therefore continually urged her to come, but I begged her in vain. An invincible repugnance to leave the place of refuge where she had hidden her grief prevented her from yielding to my wishes.

Thus passed days, weeks, months, yes, even a whole year and more of happiness. The satisfactory life I had dreamed of was now a reality, and the world I once fancied I could reveal to Lorenzo unaided he had discovered himself. It had

been revealed to him by trials, humiliation, and labor. The absolute change in his habits, which Lando had once indicated as the only remedy, had, as he had foreseen, produced a beneficial, efficacious, and lasting effect.

But we know one of the anomalies of the human heart is to expect and long for happiness as its right, and yet to be incapable of possessing it a single day in its plenitude without trembling, as if conscious it was not in the nature of things here below for it to endure a long time.

Lorenzo experienced more than most people this melancholy of happiness, which was often increased by too profound a regret for the errors of his life. It partook of the vehemence of his character, and it was sometimes difficult to overcome the sadness awakened by the remembrance of the past.

"Ginevra," said he one day, "I am far too happy for a man who merits it so little."

He said this with a gloomy expression. It was the beginning of spring. The air was soft, the sky clear, the lilacs of our little garden were in bloom, and we sat there inhaling the perfume. He repeated:

"Yes, my life is now too happy—too happy, I feel, to be of long duration." A remark somewhat trite, which is often thrown like a veil over the too excessive brightness of earthly happiness! But I could not repress a shudder as I listened to it. And yet what was there to fear . . . to desire . . . to refuse . . . when I felt the present and the future were in the hands of Him whom I loved more than anything here below?

XLIV.

THIS was the spring of the year 1859. In spite of the retirement in which we lived and Lorenzo's assiduous labors, which deprived him of the leisure to read even a newspaper, the rumors of a war between Austria and Italy had more than once reached us and excited his anxiety—excited him as every Italian was at that period at the thought of seeing his country delivered from the yoke of the foreigner. On this point public sentiment was unanimous, and many people in France will now comprehend better than they did at that time, perhaps, a cry much more sincere than many that were uttered at a later day—the only one that came from every heart: *Fuori i Tedeschi*. But till the time when the realization of this wish became possible, it was only expressed by those who labored in secret to hasten its realization; it seemed dormant among others. Political life was forbidden or impossible. An aimless, frivolous life was only embraced with the more ardor, and this state of things had furnished Lorenzo with more than one excuse at the time when he snatched at a poor one.

I had often heard him express his national and political opinions, aspirations, and prejudices, but these points had never interested me. I loved Italy as it was. I thought it beautiful, rich, and glorious. I did not imagine anything could add to the charm, past and present, which nature, poetry, religion, and history had endowed it with. From time to

time I had also heard a cry which excited my horror, and conveyed to my mind no other idea than a monstrous national and religious crime: *Roma capitale!* These words alone roused me sufficiently from my indifference to excite my indignation, and even awakened in me a feeling bordering on repugnance to all that was then called the Italian *resorgimento*.

Stella did not, in this respect, agree with me. It was her nature to be roused to enthusiasm by everything that gave proof of energy, courage, and devotedness—traits that patriotism, more or less enlightened, easily assumes the seductive appearance of, provided it is sincere. No one could repeat with more expression than she:

“*Italia! Italia!* . . . ; *
De’ fossi tu men bella! O almen piu forte!” †

Or the celebrated apostrophe of Dante:

“*Ahi serva Italia! di dolore ostello l’!*” †

Never did her talent appear to better advantage than in the recitation of such lines; her face would light up and her whole attitude change. Lorenzo often smilingly said if he wished to represent the poetical personification of Italy, he would ask Stella to become his model. As to what concerned Rome, she did not even seem to comprehend my anxiety. If a few madmen

* Italy! Italy! . . . Oh! that thou wert less fair or more powerful!

† “A slavish Italy! thou inn of grief!”—*Cary’s Dante*.

already began to utter that ominous cry, the most eminent Italians of the time declared that to infringe on the majesty of Rome, deprive her of the sovereignty which left her, in a new sense, her ancient title of queen of the world—in short, to menace the Papacy, "*l'unique grandeur vivante de l'Italie*," would be to commit the crime of treason against the world, and uncrown Italy herself.

Alas! now that the time approached for realizing some of her dreams and the bitter deception of others, Stella, absorbed in her grief, was indifferent to all that was occurring in her country, and did not even remark the universal excitement around her! As for me, who had always taken so little interest in such things, I was more unconcerned than ever, and scarcely listened to what was said on the subject in Mme. de Kergy's drawing-room. I was far from suspecting I was about to be violently roused from my state of indifference.

It was Easter Sunday. I had been to church with Lorenzo. We had fulfilled together the sweet, sacred obligations of the day; the union of our souls was complete, and our hearts were at once full of joy and solemnity—that is, in complete harmony with the great festival. At our return we found breakfast awaiting us. Ottavia, who, with a single domestic, had the care of our house, had adorned the table with flowers, as well as with a little more silver than usual, in order to render it somewhat more in accordance with the importance of the day. By means of colored-glass windows and some old paintings suspended on the dark wainscoting, Lorenzo had given our little dining-room an aspect at once serious and smiling, which greatly pleased me, and I still remember the feeling of happiness and joy with

which, on my return from church, I entered the little room, the open window of which admitted the sun and the odor of the jasmine twined around it. The three conditions of true happiness we did not lack—order, peace, and industry—and we were in that cheerful frame of mind which neither wealth, nor gratified ambition, nor any earthly prosperity is able to impart.

We took seats at the table. Lorenzo found before him a pile of letters and newspapers, but did not attempt to open them. He sat looking at me with admiration and affection. I, on my part, said to myself that moral and religious influences had not only a beneficial effect on the soul, but on the outward appearance. Never had Lorenzo's face worn such an expression; never had I been so struck with the manly beauty of his features. Our eyes met. He smiled.

"*Ginevra mia!*" said he, "in truth, you are right. The life we now lead must suit you, for you grow lovelier every day."

"Our life does not suit you less than it does me, Lorenzo," said I. "We are both in our element now. God be blessed! His goodness to us has indeed been great!"

"Yes," said he with sudden gravity, "greater a thousand times than I had any right to expect. I am really too happy!"

This time I only laughed at his observation, and tried to divert his mind from the remembrances awakened.

"Where are your letters from?"

He tore one open, and his face brightened.

"That looks well! Nothing could suit me better. Here is an American who wishes a repetition of my *Sappho*, and gives me another order of importance. And then what? He wishes

to purchase the lovely *Vestal* he saw in my studio. Oh! as for that, *par exemple*, no! . . . The *Vestal* is mine, mine alone. No one else shall ever have it. But no matter, Ginevra; if things go on in this way, I shall soon be swimming in money, and then look out for the diamonds!"

He knew now, as well as I, what I thought of such things. He laughed, and then continued to read his letters.

"This is from Lando. It is addressed to us both."

He glanced over it:

"Their honeymoon at Paris is still deferred. They cannot leave Donna Clelia."

After reading for some time in silence, he said in an animated tone:

"This letter has been written some time, and it seems there were rumors of war on all sides at the time, and poor Mariuccia, though scarcely married to her German baron, had to set out for her new home much sooner than she expected."

I listened to all this with mingled indifference and distraction, when I suddenly saw Lorenzo spring from his seat with an exclamation of so much surprise that I was eager to know what had caused his sudden excitement.

He had just opened a newspaper, and read the great news of the day: the Austrians had declared war against Italy. The beginning of the campaign was at hand.

Alas! my happy Easter was instantly darkened by a heavy cloud!

Lorenzo seized his hat, and immediately went out to obtain further details concerning the affair, leaving me sad and uneasy. Oh! how far I lived from the agitations of great political disturbances! How incapable I was of comprehending them! For a year my soul had been filled with emotions as profound as they

were sweet. After great sufferings, joys so great had been accorded me that I felt a painful shrinking from the least idea of any change. But though the power of suffering was still alive in my heart, all anxiety was extinguished. Whatever way a dear hand is laid on us, we never wish to thrust it away. I remained calm, therefore, though a painful apprehension had taken possession of my mind; and when Lorenzo returned, two hours later, I was almost prepared for what he had to communicate.

Yes, I knew it; he wished to go. Every one in the province to which his family belonged was to take part in this war of independence. He could not remain away from his brothers and the other relatives and friends who were to enroll themselves in resisting a foreign rule.

"It is the critical moment. Seconded by France, the issue cannot be doubtful this time. You know I have abhorred conspiracies all my life, and my long journeys have served to keep me away from those who would perhaps have drawn me into them. But now how can you wish me to hesitate? How can you expect me at such a time to remain inactive and tranquil? You would be the first, I am sure, to be astonished at such a course, and I hope to find you now both courageous and prompt to aid me, for I must start without any delay. You understand, my poor Ginevra, before to-morrow I must be on my way."

He said all this and much more besides. I neither tried to remonstrate nor reply. I felt he was obeying what he believed to be a call of duty, and I could use no arguments to dissuade him from it. What could I do, then? Only aid him, and bear without shrinking the unexpected blow which had come like a

sudden tempest to overthrow the edifice, but just restored, of my calm and happy life!

The day passed sadly and rapidly away. I was occupied so busily that I scarcely had time for reflection. But at last all I could do was done, and Lorenzo, who had gone out in the afternoon, found, on returning at nightfall, that everything was ready for his departure, which was to take place that very night.

We sat down side by side on a little bench against the garden-wall. Spring-time at Paris is lovely also, and everything was in bloom that year on Easter Sunday. The air even in Italy could not have been sweeter nor the sky clearer. He took my hand, and I leaned my head against his shoulder. For some minutes my heart swelled with a thousand emotions I was unable to express. I allowed my tears to flow in silence. Lorenzo likewise struggled to repress the agitation he did not wish to betray, as I saw by his trembling lips and the paleness of his face.

I wiped my eyes and raised my head.

"Lorenzo," said I all at once, "why not take me with you, instead of leaving me here?"

"To the war?" said he, smiling.

"No, but to Italy. You could leave me, no matter where. On the other side of the Alps I should be near you, and . . . should you have need of me, I could go to you."

He remained thoughtful for a moment, and then said, as if speaking to himself:

"Yes, should I be wounded, and have time to see you again, it would be a consolation, it is true."

We became silent again, and I awaited his decision with a beating heart. Finally he said in a decided tone:

"No, Ginevra, it cannot be. Remain here. It is my wish. You must."

"Why?" asked I, trying to keep back the tears that burst from my eyes at his reply—"why? Oh! tell me why?"

"Because," replied he firmly, "I have no idea what will be the result of the war in Italy. Very probably it will cause insurrections everywhere, perhaps revolutions."

"O my God!" cried I with terror . . . "and you expect me not to feel any horror at this war! Even if it had not come to overturn my poor life, how can I help shuddering at the thought of all the misery it is about to produce?"

"What can you expect, Ginevra? Yes, it is a serious affair. God alone knows what it will lead to. You see Mario writes Sicily is already a-flame. No one can tell what will take place at Naples. I should not be easy about you anywhere but here. . . . No, Ginevra, you cannot go. You must remain here. I insist upon it."

I knew, from the tone in which he said this, it was useless to insist, and I bent my head in silence. He gently continued, as he pressed my hand in his:

"The war will be short, I hope, Ginevra. If I am spared, I will hasten to resume the dear life we have led here. But if, on the contrary . . ."

He stopped a moment, then, with a sudden change of manner and an accent I shall never forget, he continued:

"But why speak to you as I should to any other woman? Why not trust to the inward strength you possess, which has as often struck me as your sweetness of disposition? I know now where your strength comes from, and will speak to you without any circumlocution."

I looked at him with surprise at this preamble, and by the soft evening light I saw a ray of heaven in his eyes; for they beamed with faith and humility as he uttered the following words:

"Why deceive you, Ginevra? Why not tell you I feel this is the last hour we shall ever pass together in this world?"

I shuddered. He put his arm around my waist, and drew me towards him.

"No, do not tremble! . . . Listen to me. . . . If I feel I am to die, I have always thought a life like mine required some other expiation besides repentance. The happiness you have afforded me is not one, and who knows if its continuation might not become a source of danger to me? Whereas to die now would be something; it would be a sacrifice worthy of being offered . . . and accepted."

My head had again fallen on his shoulder, and my heart beat so rapidly I was not able to reply.

"Look upward, Ginevra," said he in a thrilling tone; "raise your eyes towards the heaven you have taught

me to turn to, to desire, and hope for. Tell me we shall meet there again, and there find a happiness no longer attended by danger!"

Yes, at such language I felt the inward strength he had spoken of assert itself, after seeming to fail me, and this terrible, painful hour became truly an hour of benediction.

"Lorenzo," said I in a tone which, in spite of my tears, was firm, "yes, you are right, a thousand times right. Yes, whatever be your fate and mine, let us bless God! . . . We are happy without doubt; but our present life, whatever its duration, is only a short prelude to that true life of infinite happiness which awaits us. Let God do as he pleases with it and with us! Whatever be the result, there is no adieu for us."

Do I mean to say that the sorrow of parting was extinguished? Oh! no, assuredly not. We tasted its bitterness to the full, but there is a mysterious savor which is only revealed to the heart that includes all in its sacrifice, and refuses nothing. This savor was vouchsafed us at that supreme hour, and we knew and felt it strengthened our souls.

XLV.

The two weeks that succeeded this last evening seem, as I look back upon them, like one long day of expectation. Nothing occurred to relieve my constant uneasiness. A few lines from Lorenzo, written in haste as he was on the point of starting to join the army, where the post of aide-de-camp to one of the generals had been reserved for him; were the last direct news I received. From that day I had no other information but what I gathered from the newspapers, or what Mme. de Kergy and Diana obtained from their friends, who, though most of them were un-

favorable to the war in which France was engaged, felt an ardent interest in all who took part in it. But there were only vague, confused reports, which, far from calming my agitation, only served to increase it.

One evening I remained later than usual at church. Prostrate before one of the altars, which was lit up with a great number of tapers, I could not tear myself away, though night had come and the church was almost deserted. It was one of those dark, painful hours when the idea of suffering fills us with fear and repugnance, and rouses every faculty of

our nature to resist it; one of those hours of mortal anguish that no human being could support had there not been a day—a day that will endure as long as the world—when this agony was suffered by Him who wished us to participate in it in order that he might be for ever near us when we, in our turn, should have to endure it for him! . . .

Oh! in that hour I felt in how short a time I had become attached to the earthly happiness that had been granted me beyond the realization of my utmost wishes. What tender, ardent sentiments! What sweet, delightful communings already constituted a treasure in my memory which furnished material for the most fearful sacrifice I could be called upon to make! Alas! the human heart, even that to which God has deigned to reveal himself, still attaches itself strongly to all it is permitted to love on earth! But this divine love condescends to be jealous of our affection, and it is seldom he spares such hearts the extreme sacrifices which lead them to give themselves to him at last without any reserve!

When I left the church, I saw a crowd in the street. Several houses were illuminated, and on all sides I heard people talking of a great victory, the news of which had just arrived at Paris.

I returned home agitated and troubled. At what price had this victory been won? Who had fallen in the battle? What was I to hear? And when would the anguish that now contracted my heart be relieved . . . or justified? Mme. de Kergy, who hastened to participate in my anxiety, was unable to allay it. But our suspense was not of long duration. The hour, awaited with the fear of an overpowering presentiment, was soon to arrive! . . .

Two days after I was sitting in the evening on the little bench in the garden where we held our last conversation, when I received the news for which he had so strangely prepared me. His fatal prevision was realized. He was one of the first victims of the opening attack. His name, better known than many others, had been reported at once, and headed the list of those who fell in the battle.

No preparation, no acceptation of anticipated misfortune, no effort at submission or courage, was now able to preserve me from a shock similar to the one I have related the effects of at the beginning of this story. As on that occasion, I lost all consciousness, and Ottavia carried me senseless to my chamber. As then, likewise, I was for several days the prey to a burning fever, which was followed by a weakness and prostration that rendered my thoughts confused and incoherent for some time. And finally, as when I was but fifteen years old, it was also a strong, sudden emotion that helped restore my physical strength and the complete use of my senses and reason.

The most profound silence reigned in the chamber where I lay, but I felt I was surrounded by the tenderest care. At length I vaguely began to recognize voices around me; first, that of Ottavia, which made me shed my first tears—tears of emotion, caused by a return to the days of my childhood. I thought myself there again. I forgot everything that had happened since. But this partial relief restored lucidness to my mind, and with it a clear consciousness of the misfortune that had befallen me. Then I uttered a cry—a cry that alarmed my faithful nurse. But I had the strength to reassure her at once.

"Let me weep, Ottavia," said I in a low tone—"I know, . . . I recollect. Do not be alarmed; I am better, Ottavia. God be blessed, I can pray!"

I said no more, and closed my eyes. But a little while after I reopened them, and eagerly raised my head. What did I hear? Mme. de Kergy and Diana were there.

I recognized their voices, and now distinguished their faces. But whose voice was that which had just struck my ear? Whose sweet face was that so close to mine? Whose hand was that I felt the pressure of?

"O my Stella!" I cried, "is it a dream, or are you really here?"

XLVI.

No, it was not a dream. It was really Stella, who had torn herself from her retreat, her solitude and her grief, and hastened to me as soon as she heard of the fresh blow that had befallen me. She had not ceased to interest herself in all that concerned my new life, and the distant radiance of my happiness had been the only joy of her wounded heart. Now this happiness was suddenly destroyed. . . . I was far away; I was in trouble; I was alone; the state of affairs, which became more and more serious, detained my brother in Sicily; but she was free—free, alas! from every tie, from every duty, and she came to me as fast as the most rapid travelling could bring her. But when she arrived, I was unable to recognize her, and, when I now embraced her, she had watched more than a week at my bedside!

This was the sweetest consolation—the greatest human assistance heaven could send me, and it was a benefit to both of us. For each it was beneficial to have the other to think of.

My health now began to improve, and my soul recovered its serenity. I felt a solemn, profound peace, which could not be taken from me, and which continually increased; but this did not prevent me from feeling and saying with sincerity that every-

thing in this world was at an end for me.

Yes, everything was at an end; but I resigned myself to my lot, and when, after this new affliction, I found myself before the altar where I prayed that evening with so many gloomy forebodings, I fell prostrate, as, after some severe combat or long journey, a child falls exhausted on the threshold of his father's house, to which he returns never to leave it again!

If I had then obeyed my natural impulse, I should have sought some place of profound seclusion, where I could live, absorbed and lost in the thought continually present to my mind since the great day of grace which enabled me to comprehend the words: *God loves me!* and to which I could henceforth add: And whom alone I now love!

But it is seldom the case one's natural inclinations can be obeyed, especially when they incline one to a life of inaction and retirement. There is but little repose on earth, and the more we love God, the less it is permitted to sigh after it. I was forced to think of others at this time, and, above all, of the dear, faithful friend who had come so far to console me.

It did not require a long time for Mme. de Kergy to discern the heroic greatness of Stella's character,

and still less for her maternal heart, that had received so many blows, to sympathize with the broken heart of Angiolina's mother. The affection she at once conceived for Stella was so strong that I might have been almost jealous, had it not exactly realized one of my strongest desires, and had not Mme. de Kergy been one of those persons whose affection is the emanation of a higher love which is bestowed on all, without allowing that which is given to the latest comer to diminish in the least the part of the others.

She at once perceived the remedy that would be efficacious to her wounded heart, and what would be a beneficial effort for mine, and she threw us both, if I may so express myself, into that ocean of charity where all personal sufferings, trials, and considerations are forgotten, and where peace is restored to the soul by means of the very woes one encounters and succeeds in relieving.

No fatigue, no fear of contagion, the sight of no misery, affected Stella's courage; no labor wearied her patience, no application or effort was beyond her ability and perseverance. For souls thus constituted it is a genuine pleasure to exercise their noble faculties and be able to satisfy the thirst for doing good that devours them. Her eyes, therefore, soon began to brighten, her face to grow animated, and from time to time, like a reflection of the past, her lips to expand with the charming smile of former days.

There is a real enjoyment, little suspected by those who have not ex-

perienced it, in these long, fatiguing rounds, the endless staircases ascended and descended, in all these duties at once distressing and consoling, and it can be truly affirmed that there is more certainty of cheerfulness awaiting those who return home from these sad visits than the happiest of those who come from some gay, brilliant assembly. It is to the former the words of S. Francis de Sales may be addressed: "Consider the sweetest, liveliest pleasures that ever delighted your heart, and say if there is one worth the joy you now taste. . . ."

Thus peace and a certain joy returned by degrees, seconded by the sweetest, tenderest, most beneficial sympathy. Notwithstanding the solitude in which we lived, and the mourning I never intended to lay aside, and which Stella continued to wear, we spent an hour every evening at Mme. de Kergy's, leaving when it was time for her usual circle to assemble. This hour was a pleasant one, and she depended on seeing us, for she began to cling to our company. Diana, far from being jealous, declared we added to the happiness of their life; and one day, in one of her outbursts of caressing affection, she exclaimed that the good God had restored to her mother the two daughters she had mourned for so long.

At these words Mme. de Kergy's eyes filled with tears, which she hastily wiped away, and, far from contradicting her daughter, she extended her arms and held us both in a solemn, tender, maternal embrace!

XLVII.

What Stella felt at that moment I cannot say. As for me, my feelings were rather painful than pleasant. I comprehended only too well the

sadness that clouded the dear, venerable brow of Gilbert's mother, and his prolonged absence weighed on my heart like remorse. Of course I

did not consider myself the direct cause. But I could not forget that he merely left his country for a few weeks, and it was only after his sojourn at Naples he had taken the sudden resolution to make almost the tour of the world—that is, a journey whose duration was prolonged from weeks into months, and from months into years. I felt that no joy could spring up on the hearth he had forsaken till the day he should return, and it seemed to me I should not dare till that day arrived enjoy the peace that had been restored to my soul.

Months passed away, however, autumn came for the second time since Stella's arrival, and the time fixed for her departure was approaching. I had made up my mind to accompany her, and pass some time at Naples with her, in order to be near my sister; but various unforeseen events modified her plans as well as mine.

I went one day to the Hôtel de Kergy at a different hour from that I was in the habit of going. Diana and her mother had gone out. I was told they would return in an hour. I decided, therefore, to wait, and, as the weather was fine, I selected a book from one of the tables of the drawing-room, and took a seat in the garden.

While I was looking over the books, my attention was attracted to several letters that lay on the table awaiting Mme. de Kergy's return, and, to my great joy, I recognized Gilbert's writing on one of them. His long absence had this time been rendered more painful by the infrequency and irregularity of his letters. Whole months often elapsed without the arrival of any. I hoped this one had brought his mother the long-wished-for promise of his return, and cheered by this thought, I opened my

book, which soon absorbed me so completely that I forgot my anxiety, and hope, and everything else. . . .

The book I held in my hand was the *Confessions of S. Augustine*, and, opening it at hazard, the passage on which my eyes fell was this:

"What I know, not with doubt, but with certainty; what I know, O my God! is that I love thee. Thy word penetrated my heart and suddenly caused it to love thee. The heavens and the earth, and all they contain, do they not cry without ceasing that all men should love thee? But he on whom it pleaseth thee to have mercy alone can comprehend this language." *

O words, ancient but ever new, like the beauty itself that inspired them! What a flight my soul took as I read them again here in this solitude and silence. Though centuries had passed since the day they were written, how exactly they expressed, how faithfully they portrayed, the feelings of my heart! How profound was the conviction I felt, in my turn, that, without the mercy and compassion of God, I should never have been able to understand their meaning!

I was deeply, deeply plunged in these reflections, I was lost in a world, not of fancy, but of reality more delightful than a poet's dreams, when an unusual noise brought me suddenly to myself. First I heard the rattling of a carriage which I supposed to be Mme. de Kergy's. But I instantly saw two or three servants rush into the court, as if some unexpected event had occurred. Then the old gardener, at work in the parterre before me, suddenly threw down his watering-pot and uttered a cry of surprise and joy:

"O goodness of God!" exclaimed

* *Conf. of S. Aug.*, b. x. ch. vi.

he in a trembling voice, "there is Monsieur le Comte!"

"Monsieur le Comte?" cried I, hastily rising. . . .

But I had not time to finish my question. It was really he—Gilbert. He was there before me, on the upper step of the flight that led to the drawing-room. I sprang towards him with a joy I did not think of repressing or concealing, and, extending both hands, I exclaimed:

"Oh! God be blessed a thousand times. It is you! You have returned! What a joyful surprise for your mother! For Diana! For me also, I assure you! . . ."

I know not what else I was on the point of adding when, seeing him stand motionless, and gaze at me as if incapable of answering a word, a faint blush rose to my face. Was he surprised at such a greeting, or too much agitated? Perchance he was deceived as to its signification. This doubt caused a sudden embarrassment, and checked the words I was about to utter.

At length he explained his unexpected arrival. His letter ought to have arrived before. He supposed his mother was notified. . . . He wished to spare her so sudden a surprise. . . .

"I knew you were at Paris," continued he, in a tone of agitation he could not overcome. "Yes . . . I knew it, and hoped to see you again. But to find you here . . . to see you the first, O madame! that was a happiness too great for me to anticipate, and I cannot yet realize it is not, after all, a dream. . . ."

While he was thus speaking, and gazing intently at me as if I were some vision about to vanish from his sight, my joyful greeting and cordiality were changed into extreme gravity of manner, and I looked away as his eyes wandered from my face to

my mourning attire, and for the first time it occurred to me he found me free, and perhaps was now thinking of it!

Free! . . . Oh! if I have succeeded in describing the state of my soul since that moment of divine light which marked the most precious day of my life; if I have clearly expressed the aspect which the past, the present, the future, and all the joys, all the sufferings, in short, every event of my life, henceforth took in my eyes; if, I say, I have been able to make myself understood, those who have read these pages are already aware what the word *free* now signified to me.

Free! Yes, as the bird that cleaves the air is free to return to its cage; as the captive on his way to the shores of his native land is free to return and resume his chains; so is the soul that has once tasted the blessed reality of God's love free also to return to the vain dreams of earthly happiness.

"I would not accept it!" was the exclamation of a soul* that had thus been made free, and it is neither strange nor new. No more than the bird or the captive could it be tempted to return to the past. . . .

I did not utter a word, however, and the thoughts that came over me like a flood died away in the midst of the joyful excitement that put an end to this moment of silence. Mme. de Kergy and Diana, who had been sent for, arrived pale and agitated. But when I saw Gilbert in his mother's arms, I felt so happy that I entirely forgot what had occurred, and was not even embarrassed when, as I was on the point of leaving, I heard Diana say to her brother that her mother had two new

* A Sister's Story.

daughters now, and he would find three sisters instead of one in the house.

I returned home in great haste. It was the first time for a long while my heart had felt light. I searched for Stella. She was neither in the house nor garden. I then thought of the studio, where, in fact, I found her. Everything remained in the same way Lorenzo had left it, and Stella, who had a natural taste for the arts, knew enough of sculpture to devote a part of her time to it. She had succeeded in making a bust of Angiolina which was a good likeness, and she was at work upon it when I entered.

She looked at me with an air of surprise, for she saw something unusual had taken place.

"Gilbert has returned!" I exclaimed, without thinking of preparing her for the news, the effect of which I had not sufficiently foreseen.

She turned deadly pale, and her face assumed an expression I had never known it to wear. I was utterly amazed. Rising with an abrupt movement, she said, in an altered tone:

"Then I must go, Ginevra!" And, suddenly bursting into tears, she pressed her lips to the little bust, the successful production of her labor and grief.

"O my angel child!" said she, "forgive me. I know it; I ought to love no one but thee. I have been punished, cruelly punished. And yet I am not sure of myself, Ginevra. I do not wish to see him again. I must go."

It was the first time in her life Stella had thus allowed me to read the depths of her heart. It was the first time the violence of any emotion whatever broke down the wall of reserve she knew how to maintain, and made her rise above her

natural repugnance to speak of herself. It was the first time I was sure of the wound I had so long suspected, but which I had never ventured to probe.

God alone knows with what emotion I listened to her. What hopes were awakened, and what prayers rose from my heart during the moment's silence that followed these ardent words. She soon continued, with renewed agitation:

"Yes, I must start at once. I had no idea he would arrive in this way without giving me time to escape! . . ."

Then she added, in a hollow tone:

"Listen, Ginevra. For once I must be frank with you. He loves you, you well know, and now there is nothing more to separate you; now you are free. . . ."

But she stopped short, surprised, I think, at the way in which I looked at her.

"She also! Is it possible?" murmured I, replying to my own thoughts.

And my eyes, that had been fixed on her, involuntarily looked upward at the light that came from the only window in the studio. I soon said in a calm tone:

"You are mistaken, Stella. I am not free, as you suppose. But let us not speak of myself, I beg. . . ."

She listened without comprehending me, and her train of thought, interrupted for a moment, resumed its course. I was far from wishing to check a communicativeness her suffering heart had more need of than she was aware. I allowed her, therefore, to pour out without hindrance all that burdened her mind. I suffered her to give way to her unreasonable remorse. I did not even contradict her when she repeated that her sweet treasure would not have been ravished from her, had

she been worthy of possessing it, if no other love had been allowed to enter her heart. I did not oppose this fancy, which was only one of those *perfidies de l'amour*, as such imaginary wrongs have been happily styled, which, after the occurrence of misfortune, often add to one's actual sorrow a burden still heavier and more difficult to bear.

On the contrary, I assured her we would start together, and she herself should fix the day of our departure.

I only begged her not to hasten the time, and, by leaving Paris so abruptly, afflict our excellent friend at the very hour of her joy, and make Diana weep at the moment when she was so pleased at the restoration of their happiness. At last I induced her to consent that things should remain for the present as they were. She would return to the Hôtel de Kergy, and Gilbert's return should in no way change the way of life we had both led for a year.

XLVIII.

Nothing, in fact, was changed. Our morning rounds, our occupations in the afternoon, and our evening reunions, all continued the same as before. Apparently nothing new had occurred except the satisfaction and joy which once more brightened the fireside of our friends, and things were pleasanter than ever, even when Gilbert was present. This time he seemed decided to put an end to his wandering habits, and settle down with his mother, never to leave her again.

Nothing was changed, therefore. And yet before the end of the year I alone remained the same as the day of Gilbert's arrival, the day when Stella was so desirous of going away that she might not meet him again; the day when (as I must now acknowledge) he thought if he was deceived by the pleasure I manifested at seeing him again, if my sentiments did not respond to his, if some new insurmountable barrier had risen in the place of that which death had removed, then he would once more depart, he would leave his country again, he would exile himself from his friends . . . and—who knows?—perhaps die—yes, really, die of grief with a broken heart! . . .

It was somewhat in these terms he

spoke to me some time after his return, and I looked at him, as I listened, with a strange sensation of surprise. He was, however, the same he once was, the same Gilbert whose presence had afforded me so much happiness and been such a source of danger. There was no change in the charm of his expression, his voice, his wit, the elevation of his mind and character, and yet . . . I tried, but in vain, to recall the emotions of the past I once found so difficult to hide, so painful to combat, so impossible to overcome. I could not revive the dreams, the realization of which was now offered me, and convince myself it was I who had formerly regarded such a destiny as so happy a one and so worthy of envy—I, who now found it so far below the satisfied ambition of my heart. Ah! it was a good thing for me to see Gilbert again; it was well to look this earthly happiness once more in the face, in order to estimate the extent the divine arrow had penetrated my soul and opened the only true fountain of happiness and love!

It was not necessary to give utterance to all these thoughts. There was something inexpressible in my eyes, my voice, my language, my tranquillity in his presence, in my

friendship itself, so evident and sincere, which were more expressive than any words or explanation, and by degrees produced a conviction no man can resist unless he is—which Gilbert was not—blind, presumptuous, or inflated with pride.

"Amor, ch' a null' amato amar perdona,"*

says our great poet. But he should have added that, if this law is not obeyed, love dies, and he who loves soon grows weary of loving in vain.

Gilbert was not an exception to this rule. The time came for its accomplishment in his case. The day came when he realized it. It was a slow, gradual, insensible process, but at length I saw the budding, the progress, the fulfilment of my dearest hopes.

The "*sang joyeux*" which once enabled my dear Stella to endure the trials of her earlier life now diffused new joy and hope in her heart, brought back to her eyes and lips that brilliancy of color and intensity of expression which always reflected the emotions of her soul, and made her once more what she was before her great grief! . . .

I saw her at last happy—happy to a degree that had never before been shed over her life. I should have left her then, as I intended, to see Livia again; but, while the changes I have just referred to were taking place around me, the heavy, unmerciful hand of spoliation had been laid on the loved asylum where my sister hoped to find shelter for life. Soldiers' quarters were needed. The monastery was appropriated, the nuns were expelled. A greater trial than exile was inflicted on their innocent lives—a trial as severe as death, and, in fact, was death to several of

* "Love that denial takes from none beloved."—*Cary's Dante, Inferno, canto v.*

their number. They were separated from one another; the aged were received in pious families; some were dispersed in various convents of their order still spared in Italy by the act of suppression; others, again, sought refuge in countries not then affected by the tempest which, from time to time, rises against the church and strikes the religious orders as lightning always strikes the highest summits, without ever succeeding in annihilating one, but leaving to the persecutors the stigma of crime and the shame of defeat!

My sister Livia was of the number of these holy exiles. A convent of her order, not far from Paris, was assigned her as a refuge, and it was there I had the joy of once more seeing her calm, angelic face. How much we had to say to each other! How truly united we now were! What a pleasure to again find her attentive ear, her faithful heart, and her courageous, artless soul! But when, after the long account I had to give her, I asked her to tell me, in her turn, all she had suffered from the sudden, violent invasion, the profanation of a place so dear and sacred to her, and the necessity of bidding farewell to the cloudless heavens, the beautiful mountains, and all the enchanting scenery of the country she loved, she smiled:

"What difference does all that make?" said she. "Only one thing is sad: that they who have wronged us should have done us this injury. As for us, the only real privation there is they could not inflict on us; the only true exile they could not impose. *Domini est terra et plenitudo ejus!* No human power can separate us from him!"

And now there remains but little to add.

The happiness of this world, such

as it is, in all its fulness and its insufficiency, Gilbert and Stella possess. Diana also, without being obliged to leave her mother, has found a husband worthy of her and the dear sanctuary of all that is noble. Mario makes frequent journeys to France to visit his sisters, each in her retreat, and his former asperities seem to grow less and less. Lando and Teresina also come to see me every time they visit Paris, and I always find in him a sincere and faithful friend; but it is very difficult to convince him I shall never marry again, and still more so to make him understand how I can be happy.

Happy! . . . Nevertheless I am, and truly so! I am happier than I ever imagined I could be on earth; and if life sometimes seems long, I have never found it sad. Order, peace, activity, salutary friendship, a divine hope, leave nothing to be desired, and like one* who, still young,

likewise arrived through suffering to the clearest light, I said, in my turn: Nothing is wanting, for "*I believe, I love, and I wait!*"

Yes, I await the plenitude of that happiness, a single ray of which sufficed to transform my whole life. I bless God for having unveiled the profound mystery of my heart, and enabled me to solve its enigma, and to understand with the same clearness all the aspirations of the soul which constitute here below the glory and torment of our nature! I render thanks to him for being able to comprehend and believe with assurance that the reason why we are so insatiable for knowledge, for repose, for happiness, for love, for security, and for so many other blessings never found on earth to the extent they are longed for, is because "we are all created solely for what we cannot here possess!"*

* *Alexandrine de la Ferronnays.*

* *Madame Swetchine.*





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